

THE KNOW-NOTHING PARTY  
IN THE SOUTH



Our artist has presented us with a picture exhibiting the presidential race. We leave it to the imagination of our readers to decipher its meaning. It is a true representation of what, we think, will be the result. Fillmore, in his little "baby cart," will be distanced, and Jessie—the "immortal Jessie"—will find "free-soil—free-negroes—free-love, and Fremont," too much for her to pack. Old Buck will go triumphantly into the White House, and so will end all our troubles.

FROM THE LITTLE ROCK *True Democrat*, SEPTEMBER 2, 1856

*The*  
KNOW-NOTHING  
PARTY  
*in the*  
SOUTH

By  
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GLOUCESTER, MASS.

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## PREFACE

FEW periods of our history have been more momentous than that in which the American Party was born and denied. The questions of slavery, state rights, and sectionalism were moving down like a floodtide toward a final catastrophic settlement—the Civil War and Reconstruction. Every leader, every issue that attempted to act as a breakwater was either picked up and carried with the stream or was inundated and left forgotten. There were many issues and many leaders striving to guide and lead. Whether the Americans might have been able to stem disunion had they had their way is, of course, problematical. It is not the purpose of this study to develop this field of thought. Rather, the intent is to attempt to place some of these “forgotten men” and subordinated issues in a little clearer perspective; to trace the basic foundations of the party’s political being in the individual Southern states as nativism attempted to intermingle and override traditional political, economic, and social alignments; and to show how the Southern and Northern branches of the American Party found themselves dividing, realigning, contesting on sectional principles in spite of their real effort to prevent division, both in national affairs and in party management.

One of the long-neglected and unappreciated phases of the decade before 1860 is the story of Union sentiment in the South. If not always a majority, at least a strong and even militant minority, Unionists lost face because they failed. One explanation of the appeal of Know-Nothingism to Southerners was undoubtedly this desire to find a way out of the increasing sectional difficulties and animosities. It was in a sense an ideal solution to be able to berate, to let off steam and resentment on, non-Americans rather than fellow citizens. Many conservative South-

erners gladly availed themselves of the opportunity to attempt to avoid the long-debated and touchy issues of slavery and state rights. Policy as well as conviction—though much of it, it is true, was lukewarm—seemed to endorse nativism. In presenting themselves before the country as a national party the Americans found their path increasingly hard to follow and gradually experienced the unhappy fate of internal dissension.

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## CHAPTER ONE

# SOUTHERN NATIVISM

1800-1854

**T**HE ASSIMILATION and adjustment of new peoples in a strange land has throughout history caused many perplexing problems. When these new peoples were of similar race, religion, and customs, friction and difficulties were frequent, multiplying many times when nationality, religion, and folkways differed. Integration is an old problem, yet still a disturbing domestic and international question today.

Although most of the European nations contributed in some measure to the blood streams of the North American colonies, the immigrants were so predominantly English-speaking through the colonial period that few marked nativistic sentiments were aroused. From the early days of the new Union until the end of the Era of Good Feeling, only minor clashes and irritations occurred, such as those in the regions where the English peoples came in contact with the French or Spaniards. Feeling created between the adherents of England and of France prior to the War of 1812 grew into a discussion nativistic in nature. Congress passed the first naturalization law March 26, 1790, requiring two years of residence. A few years later Federalists increased the period to five years and in 1798 to fourteen years. In 1802 the Jeffersonian Republicans reduced the residence period to five years.

The dominant culture of the peoples of the United States has been English. From their English heritage came the tradition of marked antagonism to, and the actual fear of, Roman Catholicism. Suspicion, fear, religious bigotry, and hatred of Catholicism when intertwined with rivalry, distrust, dislike, and the strangeness of the great masses of foreigners, gave abundant opportunity

for the agitations and propagandists of the day to arouse native aversion to active protest and at times to extreme action. Since many of the newly arriving immigrants of the decades before the Civil War were Roman Catholic, it was natural for anti-Catholicism and antiforeignism to be associated.

The dual connection of anti-Catholicism and antiforeignism does not follow as an invariable rule, for there are exceptions that will be noted with the progress of this study; yet there was in many sections, and with numerous individuals, this twin association of antagonisms.

Early expressions of antiforeignism and anti-Catholicism, commonly designated as "nativism," began at the turn of the nineteenth century to take political form. Nativistic political associations, at first local and unrelated, began to increase in number and to assume a national character, culminating in the formation of the American Party in 1854. A brief examination of the waxing and waning of nativism from 1800 to 1854 is therefore helpful in approaching a more thorough discussion of the American Party's principles and political activities.

Webster defines nativism as the policy or practice of favoring the native inhabitants of a country as against immigrants from foreign countries. Nativism has as its basic idea that any person whose primary interests, loyalties, and sympathies lie outside America and American ideals is an undesirable citizen and a potential threat to the welfare of all good citizens. Nativism is a state of mind, conscious or unconscious, intimately connected with nationalism. Its roots, like those of nationalism, spring from a sense of common associations, common history, common speech, common customs, common religion, etc. Nativism may be regarded as an internal expression, while nationalism more aptly applies to similar feeling between national states. Nativism in its expressions has been antagonistic toward individual members or groups within the state which are conceived to be "foreign" or inimical to the government or culture of the social group as a whole. Its phases have been political, cultural, religious, economic, and racial and have been based largely upon fear, rivalry, jealousy, bigotry, and ignorance.

Nativism in the United States has existed whenever and wher-

ever there were sufficient numbers of immigrants to cause Americans to become aware of them. Consciousness of differences in dress, speech, foods, religion, and philosophy of life led to suspicion. Suspicion led to conjecture; conjecture to investigation; and investigation to the realization that other communities in the United States likewise felt similar forebodings about possible threats to American institutions by those transplanted Europeans who failed to become, or were slow to become, acclimated to Anglo-American cultural and political ideals. Once alarm was raised, descendants of older stocks banded together to "protect" themselves from the increasing numbers of newcomers pouring into the United States.

One of the earlier indications of nativistic feeling was the riot which broke out against the Catholics of New York City on Christmas Eve, 1806. The following spring the American ticket was put forward unsuccessfully. Twenty years later the Native Americans again ineffectually organized to control New York State. In 1834 Samuel F. B. Morse, by attacking the Leopold Society in a series of twelve letters under the signature of "Brutus," helped organize the Native Democratic Association. These twelve letters, entitled *Foreign Conspiracy*, and a companion volume by the Reverend Herman Norton (the corresponding secretary of the American Protestant Society), the *Startling Facts for American Protestants*, were published by the American and Foreign Christian Union of New York.

Morse had asserted that the Leopold Society had been established by the Holy Alliance in a nefarious plan to extend European ideas and form of government through the media of an increase in the number and power of the Catholic churches. Perhaps the agitation in England resulting from discussion of Catholic emancipation was also reflected in American nationalism.<sup>1</sup>

In 1841 Winfield Scott wrote to a group of native American Republicans that he had been so angered at the elections of New

<sup>1</sup> William G. Brownlow, *Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism, Romanism, and Bogus Democracy, in the Light of Reason, History and Scripture in Which Certain Demagogues in Tennessee, and Elsewhere, are Shown Up in Their True Colors* (Nashville, 1856), 113; Louis Dow Scisco, "Political Nativism in New York State," in *Columbia University Studies in History, Economics and Public Law*, XIII (1901), 22.

York in 1836 by foreigners crying "down with the natives," that he had helped write an address to aid the formation of a new party. This was to have been called either the "American Republican" or the "Democratic American Party."<sup>2</sup>

In 1837 the North American Association of the United States was formed, with Washington, D.C., as the national headquarters. In Baltimore and New Orleans papers were established under the title *Native American*. The prospectus of the Baltimore *Native American* listed among its objectives the repeal of the naturalization laws, re-establishment of the rights of native Americans, and defeat of parties adverse to those interests.

This periodical was crowded with antiforeign sentiments that were to become familiar to the citizens of the country two decades later. England was accused of flooding the United States with her paupers to relieve herself of the burden of their support. Articles depicted the poverty of Ireland and Irish immigrants, and stated that the Continental emigrants were most likely to be beggars and thieves. James Fenimore Cooper was quoted as making caustic remarks against foreigners, accusing them of drinking to excess, controlling American seaports, and influencing diplomatic appointments. The Cincinnati *Whig* was credited with advising Americans that "To these false *foreigners*, You give your throne, and wrong a friend, a kinsman, and son." In a long editorial, "The Impulses of Nature," the editors attempted to prove that foreign-born citizens and foreign-born officeholders were giving information and counteracting American movements because they were still bound to their native soil "as the child is bound to its mother—as the heart is linked to the loved circle of the parents' hearth. . . . We would not trust them—they are not us—they ridicule our simple life. . . . they boast of everything in the old country . . . and declare there is no place after all like home—only here is cheaper living, better wages, more lands, and plenty of fuel—and practice the social vices as if the freedom of our country was the patron principle of crime."<sup>3</sup>

Native Americans throughout the country were invited to form auxiliary county, city, and state associations, and to send

<sup>2</sup> C. W. Elliot, *Winfield Scott* (New York, 1937), 396.

<sup>3</sup> Baltimore *Native American*, December 16, 1837.



memorials to Congress. The citizens of Germantown, Pennsylvania, responded. They adopted a series of resolutions showing the evils and problems resulting from great numbers of unassimilated immigrants and demanded that these evils be rectified by amending the naturalization laws.

In 1837 Representative J. M. Patton of Virginia (later a prominent Know-Nothing leader) presented a petition from citizens of the Washington Native American Association asking for an amendment to the naturalization laws. In this same year Wurtsborough, New York, petitioned the Senate to prevent all Catholic immigration. In debate Henry Clay said that this would be unconstitutional but acknowledged the need of immigration reform. The following year a New York representative, D. A. Russell, introduced a resolution, which passed the House, asking for reports from our consuls regarding pauper emigration. Reports from Jamaica and German ports were that paupers and criminals were forcibly sent to the United States at public cost. Two bills to remedy the situation were reported by a select committee on July 2, 1838, but the expiration of the session kept action from being taken.

In the Pennsylvania state legislature an amendment was introduced to prevent all foreigners, especially the Irish and Germans, who should come into the state after July 4, 1841, from voting or holding office.<sup>4</sup>

The formation of the Native American Party of Louisiana in New Orleans in 1835 gave evidence that nativism was not confined to the East and the Upper South. The president, William Christy, spoke to similar organizations in Galveston and Cincinnati during the year 1839. Returning to New Orleans, he and two of his sons silenced an anti-American paper by the simple expedient of wielding axes, receiving several bullet wounds in retaliation.<sup>5</sup>

In 1839 the Native Americans of Louisiana in a pamphlet in defense of their views stated that they desired laws prohibiting

<sup>4</sup> John Sanderson, *Republican Landmarks, the Views and Opinions of American Statesmen on Foreign Immigration, Being a Collection of Statistics on Population, Pauperism, Crime, etc.* (Philadelphia, 1856), 54-55, 140; Raleigh *Democratic Signal*, October 11, 1844; Baltimore *Native American*, December 9, 1837.

<sup>5</sup> New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, July 3, 1855.

uneducated and radical foreigners, paupers, criminals, and their kind from interfering with the government. Foreigners taught from infancy to hate and abhor American institutions, lacking correct ideas of rational liberty, social virtue, or political subordination, and habituated by education to tumult and insurrection, would, they believed, be dangerous recipients of hasty enfranchisement. The party denied hostility to foreign immigration, welcomed them to the blessings of American prosperity and liberty, but decried their assumption of political mastery. The following handbill, distributed in New York, was cited as proof that foreigners intended to dominate: "IRISHMEN to your Post, or you will lose America. By perseverance you may become its rulers. By negligence you will become its slaves. Your own country was lost by submitting to ambitious men. This beautiful country you gain by being firm and united. Vote the ticket, Alexander Stewart, Alderman, Edward Flanagan for Assessor, both true IRISHMEN." <sup>6</sup>

Responding to his aroused constituents, Congressman Henry Johnson of Louisiana presented a nativistic petition which was discussed in the House Committee of the Whole. A similar resolution by a New York representative was killed in the next session. A like resolution before the Senate was never considered. Such petitions and resolutions, while not leading immediately to remedial legislation, were indicative of latent discontent and dissatisfaction among native citizens.

The Baltimore *Native American* in 1840 boasted that it had maintained a continuous existence since the formation of the Native American Association of the United States, and had attained a circulation of one thousand. It proudly pointed to the strength of the New Orleans *Native American* with its several thousand subscriptions, to the auxiliary organs published in New York, and to the strong Washington *Native American*. One issue carried the prospectus of a new Baltimore paper, *The Spirit of 76*, to advocate the advancement of agriculture, manufacturing, etc., "steering clear of politics of the day, yet maintaining Americans were ca-

<sup>6</sup> *Address of the Louisiana Native American Association to the Citizens of Louisiana and the Inhabitants of the United States* (New Orleans, 1839), 5; *Washington Daily American Organ*, November 13, 1854.

pable of governing themselves." <sup>7</sup> The advertisement of the New Orleans *Native American* in this same issue declared that it stood for repeal of the naturalization laws and that it was not connected with the great political parties except upon the merits of their opinion upon this question. St. Louis, Charlotte, Norfolk, Lexington, Louisville, and Shelby, Tennessee, all had journals nativistically inclined; New Orleans had four, and Baltimore three.

The constitution of the Native American Association of the United States consisted of a long preamble and ten articles, which proposed repeal of naturalization laws, religious freedom, and exclusion of foreigners from state and national offices, without adherence to any local or national party.<sup>8</sup>

In several sections of the United States, native Americanism in local politics was evident. Nativism was the issue of the New Orleans municipal contest of 1840, splitting the Whigs and Democrats. In New York that same year the American Republican Party, newly reorganized as a nativistic party, won the mayorship and control of the Council. Several other New York and New Jersey towns followed suit. Sutton and Millville, Massachusetts, sent a memorial to Congress asking an investigation of the influx of foreigners. Another memorial objected, not on religious but on political grounds, to the Catholic Leopold Society's encouraging European Catholics to migrate. Representatives of St. Mary's Parish and the New Orleans district presented a petition to Congress praying for the repeal of the naturalization laws; a similar petition came from Illinois. When Representative J. P. Walker of Wisconsin tried to reduce the naturalization residence period from five years to three years, William Archer of Virginia took the lead in preventing the passage of his bill. Yet two years later, in 1844, Archer presented twelve nativistic petitions within a week.

In 1841 nativistic strength had increased so greatly in Louisi-

<sup>7</sup> Baltimore *Native American*, September 5, 1840; Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade 1800-1860* (New York, 1938), 218-19n., lists the papers that were nativistically inclined in 1845. Those from the South were: St. Louis *Pennant* and *Native American*, New Orleans *Republican* and *Constitutionalist*, New Orleans *Native American*, New Orleans *Topic*, Baltimore *American Republican*, Baltimore *Clipper*, Charlotte *Journal*, Lexington *Inquirer*, Shelby (Kentucky) *News*, Norfolk *American*, and Louisville *Courier*.

<sup>8</sup> Baltimore *Native American*, November 5, 1840.

ana that the Louisiana House of Representatives by a vote of 20 to 10 adopted a resolution asking that the naturalization laws be amended to require twenty-one years' residence for citizenship. A delegation was sent to Congress to press for this modification. The Louisiana Native Americans met in convention in New Orleans on February 22, 1841, and published an *Address To The People of the United States*. The following year they lost in their attempts to influence the mayoral races in Baton Rouge and New Orleans. Similar attempts were made in St. Louis, Lexington, Baltimore, and several Northern cities.<sup>9</sup>

Nativism continued to play a more important part in Louisiana politics than in the other Southern states, largely because the Democrats in Louisiana made special efforts to attract and utilize foreign votes, aided by the fact that the newly arrived immigrant found meaning in the word "democrat," while "whig" was only the name of a party. Carl Schurz asserted that immigrants "drifted into the Democratic Party, which represented itself to them as the protector of the political rights of the foreign born population, while the Whigs were suspected of 'nativistic' tendencies. . . . The attachment of the foreign born, and among them the Germans, to the Democratic Party was therefore, not at all unnatural, and although the Germans were at heart opposed to slavery, yet their anxiety about their own rights outweighed for the time all other considerations, and seemed to keep them in Democratic ranks."<sup>10</sup> A North Carolina Democratic editor told the few foreigners in that state, "Native Americanism and Whiggery is [*sic*] one and the *same thing*. Let every naturalized citizen when he goes to the polls remember that they must both triumph or fall together, and *Govern Himself Accordingly*."<sup>11</sup>

The Democrats, quickly learning to profit by the significance attached to their cognomen, soon organized the newly naturalized citizens into Democratic supporters. In fact, eager for support at the polls by these new arrivals, they often aided or con-

<sup>9</sup> New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, January 8, September 1, 1855; Baton Rouge *Weekly Gazette*, April 3, 1842, November 23, 1844; Peyton Hurt, "The Rise and Fall of the 'Know Nothings' in California," reprint from the *California Historical Society Quarterly*, IX (1930), 13.

<sup>10</sup> Carl Schurz, *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz*, 3 vols. (New York, 1907-1909), II, 55-66.

<sup>11</sup> Raleigh *Democratic Signal*, October 11, 1844.

nived at fraudulent naturalization or allowed them to vote by use of someone else's papers. In the September, 1843, elections in New Orleans the Democrats perpetrated so many fraudulent naturalizations that the judge granting the papers was impeached by the state legislature. The Whigs led the fight for a successful conviction.<sup>12</sup> During the municipal election in April, 1844, further clashes occurred at the polls. The infamous Plaquemines frauds of the same period aroused more animosity against foreign participation in fraudulent voting.

The course of events and the force of circumstances drove the Whigs into a nativistic stand. They refused to call themselves Native Americans, yet they adopted many of their principles.<sup>13</sup> Senator Alexander Porter, a Louisiana Whig, favored a fourteen-year naturalization period. Fearing the alliance between the Democrats and foreigners, he wrote to Senator John J. Crittenden in 1841, "Such a mass of ignorance and passion all on one side have [*sic*] a most dangerous influence when the parties in the country are nearly balanced."<sup>14</sup>

Preceding the election of delegates to a Louisiana state constitutional convention, the Whig papers were full of long and critical articles on foreign immigration. In the convention, a losing but persistent and bitter fight was made by a minority to increase the residence required for suffrage for foreigners. The only concession to this minority was the increase of residence from one to two years, one of which had to be in the parish in which the vote was cast. Judah P. Benjamin, who at this time was dallying with nativistic principles, made strong speeches favoring a lengthened period. In the fall of 1844 he signed a call for the formation of a new Louisiana American Party.<sup>15</sup>

As a result of the increasing nativistic pressure, Senators Henry

<sup>12</sup> A. C. Cole, "Nativism in the Lower Mississippi Valley," in Mississippi Valley Historical Association *Proceedings*, VI (1913), 263-64.

<sup>13</sup> Alexandria (Louisiana) *Southern Transcript*, June 26, 1844; *The Tribune Almanac for the Years 1838 to 1868, Inclusive: Comprehending the Politicians' Register and the Whig Almanac*, 2 vols. (New York, 1868), II, 1855, 9-10, hereinafter cited as the *Whig Almanac*; Baton Rouge *Weekly Gazette*, December 21, 1844.

<sup>14</sup> A. C. Cole, *Whig Party in the South* (Washington, 1913), 310n.

<sup>15</sup> W. Darrell Overdyke, "The History of the American Party in Louisiana," in *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XV-XVI (1932-1933), XV, 584-85; Pierce Butler, *Judah P. Benjamin* (Philadelphia, 1907), 71.

Johnson and Alexander Barrow of Louisiana were able successfully to sponsor a series of resolutions instructing the Judiciary Committee of the Senate to study, investigate, and recommend legislation to prevent fraudulent naturalization, fraud and violence at the polling booths, and the introduction of undesirable foreigners. The committee made a lengthy investigation of conditions in the cities of New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New Orleans. Nearly two hundred pages of testimony revealed almost unbelievable amounts and methods of fraud and corruption connected with the granting of naturalization papers and voting. On March 3, 1845, by a strict party vote the Whigs got five thousand copies of this report printed for public distribution.<sup>16</sup>

Earlier in the year Senator John M. Berrien from Georgia, on behalf of the Committee on the Judiciary, reported a bill to establish a uniform rule of naturalization. The new regulations were to be stricter, but were not to prolong the naturalization period. The bill did not pass. In the House a similar bill died in the Committee of the Whole.<sup>17</sup>

New Orleans, the chief Southern port of immigration, ranked second to New York in 1850 in total numbers of immigrants admitted to the United States. The city had a very apparent problem in assimilating and caring for the newly arrived immigrants. At this time it was largely left to the various states to control the entrance of those immigrants of poor moral, mental, physical, and economic qualifications. The Louisiana legislature in 1850 attempted to solve the problem by the passage of a law requiring every person not a resident of the United States who landed at any place within the state to post a bond of \$1,000 that he would not within five years become dependent upon a state or municipal institution. Commutation of the bond could be had by payment of a head tax.<sup>18</sup>

New Orleans, St. Louis, and Louisville, the chief cities on the inland waterway into the heart of the agricultural South and

<sup>16</sup> *Senate Documents*, 28 Cong., 2 Sess., IX, No. 173, *passim*; *Congressional Globe*, 28 Cong., 2 Sess., 389-90.

<sup>17</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 28 Cong., 2 Sess., 224, 309, 389-90, Appendix, 130.

<sup>18</sup> M. W. Cluskey, *Political Text-Book, or Encyclopedia* (Philadelphia, 1860), 219; Cole, "Nativism in the Lower Mississippi Valley," *loc. cit.*, 258.

West, unfortunately found themselves acting as filters to retain the weaker, less capable, and less desirable of the incoming immigrants. The scum from European almshouses, prisons, and asylums, remaining as a residue, gave rise to serious problems. Kentucky, Louisiana, and Missouri in 1850 contained two thirds of the total foreign-born population in the South. St. Louis, in fact, had more foreign-born residents than native. In New Orleans, the Seventh Census gave a nearly equal proportion of native and foreign-born. In 1845, 15,537 foreigners arrived at the city's port. In 1847 there were 34,803, and in 1852, 32,316. In 1850 there were 66,413 foreigners among the state's population of 279,953—a percentage of 24.33.<sup>19</sup>

Immigrants flooded the public hospitals and charitable organizations. The city hospital of St. Louis between April of 1850 and September of 1851 admitted 2,155 patients.<sup>20</sup> Of these over one half were Irish, one fourth German, with only one tenth being native citizens. In 1835 the Charity Hospital of New Orleans treated 4,287 foreign patients, and only 1,677 American. In 1843, 3,859 out of 5,012 admissions were foreigners. From 1830 to January, 1843, while this hospital was treating 17,021 natives, some 20,742 persons of Irish birth were admitted. In addition, thousands of other foreigners were hospitalized.<sup>21</sup>

Statistics gathered by the Judiciary Committee of the Senate in its investigation in Baltimore in 1845 disclosed shocking health and sanitation conditions among the immigrants entering Maryland between 1828 and 1845.

So strong had the position of the foreign-born become in the United States that on December 11, 1843, the vote of the Speaker aided in tabling a motion requiring the printing of the President's annual message in French and German as well as in English.<sup>22</sup> So apparent was the connection between the Democrats and the naturalized citizens that the German Democratic Association of Louisville resolved: "We request every German to register his

<sup>19</sup> Cole, "Nativism in the Lower Mississippi Valley," *loc. cit.*, 259-60; J. D. B. DeBow, *Compendium of the Seventh Census* (Washington, 1857), 118, 123, 399.

<sup>20</sup> St. Louis *Weekly Intelligencer*, April 8, 1856.

<sup>21</sup> Overdyke, "History of the American Party in Louisiana," *loc. cit.*, 587.

<sup>22</sup> *Senate Documents*, 28 Cong., 2 Sess., IX, No. 173, 90-120; *Cong. Globe*, 28 Cong., 1 Sess., 42-44.

name on the protocol book; and that every one who leaves the party without giving his reasons before a public meeting, shall be published in the papers as a *Fellow Worthy To Be Recognized As A Contuemmer* [sic] *of the German Nation.*"<sup>23</sup>

The associations formed by these Germans, and their pronouncements in favor of radical reform which they were publishing in 1851 in 150 newspapers, became increasingly irritating to many Americans.<sup>24</sup> Among the conservative and the religious people of the United States, the large number of German free-thinkers was causing great uneasiness.

The sanguinary Kensington (Pennsylvania) riots of 1844 which lasted for days were fanned by the feeling between the nativistic Americans and the Irish Catholic immigrants. The riots were occasioned by a ban on the use of Protestant Bibles for a daily scripture reading in the public schools. To the use of these Bibles the Catholics had strenuously objected.<sup>25</sup> Partially because of the odium attached to the riots, the name Native American was temporarily dropped and the movement was continued under the auspices of the newly organized American Republican Party. Abandoning anti-Catholic agitation and becoming purely nativistic, the party was able to poll only 3,300 votes in the next Maryland election.

The disappointment over Clay's defeat in 1844, which was partially due to the support which the Democrats had received from the foreign vote, caused the Whigs throughout the United States to drift further as a body to nativism. Nativistic organizations in New York, Illinois, and New Jersey were active in 1845, and delegates were sent to the national convention of the American Party. Millard Fillmore wrote Henry Clay from Buffalo on November 14, 1844: "The abolitionists and Foreign Catholics have defeated us in this state. . . . Our opponents, by pointing to the Native Americans and to Mr. Frelinghuysen drove the Foreign

<sup>23</sup> Baton Rouge *Weekly Gazette*, August 31, 1844.

<sup>24</sup> Mary St. Patrick McConville, *Political Nativism in the State of Maryland* (Washington, 1928), 53, makes the dubious assertion that one half of these were atheistic.

<sup>25</sup> John Hancock Lee, *History of the American Party* (Philadelphia, 1855), Chaps. I-XXI. This volume was written to justify the Kensington riots and to decrease the antipathy to the conduct of the Native Americans.



Catholics from us and defeated us.”<sup>26</sup> Fillmore, however, as vice-presidential candidate in 1848 refused to reveal his opinion on the regulation of immigration and naturalization because he felt obligated to uphold the Whig platform without change. Louisiana, a veritable hotbed of nativism, continued to have its legislature request its congressmen and senators to amend the naturalization laws.

Going hand in hand at times throughout American history, and apart and distinct at other times, is another movement that has often been mistaken for and confused with nativism. This is the feeling against Catholics that has been expressed in various forms. Since many of the Catholics were foreign, and nearly all the priests were foreign,<sup>27</sup> and because the ultramontane doctrines of some members of the Church were objected to by the Native Americans, it is easy to see how casual observers have seen nativism and anti-Catholicism as synonymous. Nativism is not necessarily an expression of religious rivalry or intolerance. Many nativists have been anti-Catholic, but many have been faithful members of the Catholic Church.

Some of those who admired or rejected nativism did so with a lack of understanding or frankness to themselves, or others, of their motives for so doing. Anti-Catholic agitation in a large-range view has been a social phenomenon cutting across party lines and party politics. Only occasionally did the paths of politics and religious discussion merge. Therefore, this study does not propose a review of the intricate and detailed story of anti-Catholic agitation previous to the rise of the American Party. This has been done well and recently.<sup>28</sup> The struggle between the two religious groups was widespread and savage. Little delicacy is observable on either side. Intellectually hidebound dogmaticians flung their blasts at each other by pen and tongue. Others used the weapons with which they were more familiar—fists, clubs, guns, and the torch.

<sup>26</sup> Hillsboro (North Carolina) *Recorder*, April 16, 1856.

<sup>27</sup> J. J. O'Connell, *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia: Leaves of Its History* (New York, 1879), 488.

<sup>28</sup> Billington, *The Protestant Crusade 1800-1860*, *passim*. Unfortunately this excellent study does not clearly distinguish between nativism and anti-Catholicism.

The Native American and American Republican parties lacked the strength to do more in the political field than carry isolated elections in a few of the larger cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, St. Louis, and New Orleans. They did not represent the full strength of nativism, for in addition there were numerous nonpolitical nativistic associations. The most enduring of these in its span of life, and the most numerous in its membership, was the Order of United Americans, generally known as the O.U.A. Formed in 1844, by 1855 it had spread to sixteen states, where it functioned as a fraternal lodge. T. R. Whitney, one of its founders and a leading light in nativism until the Civil War, states that members bound themselves "to release our country from the thralldom of foreign dominion," to protect civil and religious liberties, and "to assail no man for his religious principles." The only secrecy connected with the Order of United Americans was the ceremonial ritual of one degree. It took little part in politics, only occasionally supporting a "brother" against a "foreigner." In 1856 it offered to throw its influence behind the Fillmore and Donelson ticket.<sup>29</sup>

Whitney states that by 1854-1855 the Order had branches in nearly all the Western and Southern states. This is probably an error unless he considered the American Party as a direct descendant of the Order of United Americans. Peyton Hurt, a student of the movement in California, states that the O.U.A. merged into Americanism in California. Yet this order was still vigorous and thriving when the Americans had disappeared. Whitney says that it was installed in Louisiana in 1855.<sup>30</sup> If this is accurate it probably died very quickly, as there is no extant evidence of its existence. An auxiliary, the United Daughters of America, was formed in 1844. The United American Mechanics originated in Philadelphia in 1845 for the purposes of giving mutual aid and benevolence to its members, of reforming the naturalization laws, and of opposing foreign labor. Other similar organizations were the Sons of America, formed in Philadelphia in 1845; the Benevo-

<sup>29</sup> Executive Committee New York State United Order of Americans to A. J. Donelson, July 25, 1856, Andrew J. Donelson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>30</sup> Hurt, "The Rise and Fall of the 'Know Nothings' in California," *loc. cit.*, 12; T. R. Whitney, *A Defense of the American Policy as Opposed to the Encroachments of Foreign Influence* (New York, 1856), 258-72.

lent Order of Bereans, started in New York in 1845; and the American Protestant Association, organized by Protestant Irish. On March 12, 1853, the United Sons of America was instituted in Baltimore. It remained distinct from the American Party but worked for similar ideals, refraining from political activity.<sup>31</sup>

From 1800 to the inception of the American Party in 1854, sporadic efforts were made to organize the antforeign and anti-Catholic groups into an effective national political party. Attempts to hold national conventions for this purpose met with little success. In Philadelphia in July, 1845, delegates from thirteen states met and drew up a declaration of principles. Among the 141 delegates were those from the slave states of Kentucky, Mississippi, Georgia, and North Carolina. The second national convention, which assembled in 1847 at Pittsburgh, adjourned to Philadelphia, where Zachary Taylor and Henry Dearborn were nominated, but the party did not have the strength to conduct a campaign. On July 5, 1852, meeting in Trenton, New Jersey, they nominated Daniel Webster and George C. Washington. The latter declined the honor. Only ten states had representation, and dissension caused twelve delegates to leave. The party made no canvass and permanently died, for a newer and stronger movement, the American Party, appeared before the next national election.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Baltimore *Clipper*, March 12, 15, 1853; Scisco, "Political Nativism in New York State," *loc. cit.*, 67-68.

<sup>32</sup> Lee, *History of the American Party*, 228, 256; *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, V (August, 1852), 553; *Washington National Intelligencer*, July 10, 1852.

## CHAPTER TWO

# CONDITIONS FAVORABLE TO NATIVISM IN THE SOUTH

1850-1860

OF THE fourteen states encompassed in this study as "Southern," only five states, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Missouri, and Texas had sufficient foreign-born unassimilated population to present serious economic, social, and political problems. In such states as Alabama, Virginia, South Carolina, and Tennessee, foreigners were noticeable only in a few of the larger communities. Other states had only a handful of foreign-born inhabitants. Indeed the four states in the Union with the lowest percentages (.33 to 1.08 per cent) of foreign citizens were Southern: North Carolina, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Georgia. The absence of foreigners within their own state borders may have handicapped, but did not prevent, organized expressions of antinativism. This was particularly true in those states where "native" Protestantism could be stirred up against "foreign" Catholicism.

The extreme pauperism of many immigrants caused numerous Americans to espouse nativism. St. Louis, New Orleans, Boston, Baltimore, and New York were reported to have four to five times as many foreign paupers as native. The census of 1850 showed that over half the paupers in the United States were foreign-born. One out of every thirty-three foreign-born residents was a pauper, while only one out of every three hundred natives was a public charge. In 1849 the Southern states spent over one and one-half million dollars on paupers. Maryland, Missouri, and Louisiana led the list in amounts expended.<sup>1</sup> The Southern

<sup>1</sup> *Washington Daily American Organ*, November 13, 1854; Sanderson, *Republican Landmarks*, 26-27.

states got more than a full share of these undesirables because Southern laws and regulations to prohibit their landing were not stringent.

The presence of certain radical German socialist groups in the country and their increased activity as their numbers grew and as they fell under the influence of the radicals and liberals of the 1848 exodus were additional factors favoring the inception of nativism. These German associations were active in the Southern states of Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, Texas, and Missouri. They existed in some of the other states but went unnoticed. The editor of the Richmond *Whig* wrote in November, 1854: "Few people are aware that among our adopted citizens there has of late been founded by the recent political refugees from Europe, regular Red Republican societies that purpose to pull down our government. . . . Their associations have been formed in all our larger cities. One of them has lately been established here, by a certain so called Dr. Sternmetz, a newly imported German radical who wants to tear down our government before he knows what it is."<sup>2</sup> The editor then quoted from a German paper called the *Wecker*, published in Baltimore, which advocated such political reforms as universal suffrage, making all offices elective, abolition of the presidency and the senate, adoption of the recall, an easier amendatory process, free courts, and a department to encourage immigration.

The religious reforms demanded no compulsory Sunday laws, no congressional prayers, no oaths on the Bible, taxation of church property, and the prohibition of the incorporation of church property to be held in the name of ecclesiastics.

"Land Reforms" proposed an eight-hour working day, with a five-hour one for children, unionization societies, government control of railroads, free schools in which German should be compulsory, old-age homes, abolition of slavery, and abolition of capital punishment.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by the Richmond *Daily Penny Post*, January 31, 1855.

<sup>3</sup> Richmond *Whig and Advertiser*, January 3, 1855; Richmond *Daily Enquirer*, February 2, 1855; Ella Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill, 1940), 3, says that German Societies of the Krankenverein, Schiller-Loge, Turnverein, and Theaterverein, and Sangerbund were founded in Virginia in the fifties.

A German Social Democratic Association was founded in Richmond in 1851. Mississippi papers protested against the "Free German" clubs which met weekly in St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Louisville. The presence of such groups in the slaveholding, religious, and conservative South could not but create a feeling of uneasiness.<sup>4</sup>

It had often been asserted that the foreign voters had the power to elect the President of the United States because they held the balance of power between the Whigs and the Democrats. N. P. Banks of Massachusetts attempted to show on the floor of the House, by statistics taken from the election of Pierce over Scott in 1852, that a change of 139,000 votes would have given Scott all the electoral votes. Banks and the *American Organ* argued that New York, with a foreign population of 655,244, had 93,317 foreign voters, who, by giving Pierce 27,201 votes, cast 35 electoral votes; Maryland, with 51,011 foreigners, had 7,287 foreign voters to give Pierce a 4,916 majority and 8 electoral votes; Louisiana, with 67,308 foreigners, cast 9,615 foreign votes to give Pierce 6 electoral votes.<sup>5</sup> In a somewhat different tone, W. C. Rives of Virginia wrote to William M. Burwell of Maryland that the way to redress this unbalance of population between the North and South was to encourage immigration to the South from the North or from Europe. He believed such a policy could be safely followed if the immigrants were confined to the "industrial elements" and political privileges restricted. The letter was occasioned by a controversial article in the August number of *DeBow's Review*, "On Sectional Jealousies in the Union."<sup>6</sup>

Southern nativists were alarmed not only at the numbers of foreigners but at the policy of the Democratic Party in aiding fraudulent naturalization. This long-voiced grievance found repeated expression as the Americans waxed in strength. Minnesota enfranchised foreigners after four months' residence, without requiring naturalization papers. Ohio did likewise after one year's

<sup>4</sup> Woodville (Mississippi) *Wilkinson Whig*, June 3, 1854.

<sup>5</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., Appendix, 52; *Washington Weekly American Organ*, November 13, 1854.

<sup>6</sup> W. C. Rives to William M. Burwell, November 12, 1854, William M. Burwell Papers, Library of Congress.

residence. The states of Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan also allowed unnaturalized foreigners the ballot.<sup>7</sup>

The following analyses of conditions existing in the South during the decade 1850-1860 give a partial explanation why nativism itself, separate and apart from other political and sectional considerations, had some *raison d'être* in the South.

Maryland had long been a hotbed of nativism. Nativistic feeling had been particularly acute in the decade before the rise of Americanism. Baltimore, like New Orleans, was one of the two important Southern ports of entry for immigrants. Like New Orleans, Baltimore found that many immigrants remained instead of traveling on to the West. The census of 1860 gave Maryland a white population of 599,860, of which 67,536, or 11 per cent, were foreign born. Of Baltimore's total population of 212,418, including slaves, 52,497, or 24 per cent, were foreign born. Of these 32,613 were German and 15,536 were Irish.

In 1854 the state courts in Baltimore granted 907 naturalization papers and registered 2,008 declarations of intent, while the Federal courts gave 403 final papers and received 1,200 declarations of intent.<sup>8</sup> Most of the newly naturalized drifted, here as elsewhere, into Democratic ranks. Some of the German element in Baltimore entered politics as a group during the congressional race of 1853 by holding a meeting for Germans only. Instantly this aroused the resentment of the natives.

The Irish, even more than the Germans, called unfavorable attention to themselves by their fighting, rioting, drunkenness, and squalor. Holidays and Sundays were favorite occasions for brawling. Toughs and rowdies did not confine the use of clubs, stones, dirks, pistols, and guns to each other, but turned them against innocent and peaceable citizens for reasons of sport, spite, and robbery. Some of the Irish riots were on a large scale, espe-

<sup>7</sup> D. V. Smith, "The Influence of the Foreign Born of the Northwest in the Election of 1860," in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XIX (1932), 192-204; Frederick Saunders, *A Voice to America, or the Model Republic, Its Glory, or Its Fate: With a Review of the Causes of the Decline and Failure of South America, Mexico, and of the Old World, Applied to the Present Crisis in the United States* (New York, 1855), 276, says that only Indiana and Wisconsin gave aliens state citizenship before they were naturalized.

<sup>8</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, January 6, 1855.

cially when rival volunteer fire companies clashed in pitched battles. One such bloody battle on August 18, 1855, between several fire companies lasted several hours. The police intervened after two men were killed and many wounded. Even the most prominent citizens were not safe from these ruffians. The mayor escaped being seized and "cooped" during the election of 1850 only by the swiftness of his horse.<sup>9</sup>

Those who resented such lawlessness tended to become adherents of the Americans, although as later events were to prove, the Americans themselves occasionally were somewhat rough and rowdy.

Most of the Irish, as well as a few of the Germans, were Catholic. To many Protestants this made them objects of suspicion, or even of fear. In April, 1852, Alessandro Gavazzi, an apostate priest, created ill will toward the Baltimore Catholics by his savage denunciations and "exposures."<sup>10</sup> Animosity was heightened by the church trustee controversy in New York and the arrival of Gaetano Bedini as Papal Nuncio. To those American Catholics who believed in the control of the Church property by the laity, and to most Americans in general, Bedini appeared as a foreigner interfering in American affairs, and taking the wrong side at that.

In the nation-wide controversy that arose over his visit, decisions, and travels, the Baltimore *Catholic Mirror* was frequently heard defending Bedini. On January 11, 1854, the Baltimore *Sun* printed a copy of a broadside which had been distributed in Wheeling, Virginia. The broadside, similar to the one that had appeared in New Orleans, called upon the "freemen" to arise against the "butcher" who "was not worthy to breathe American air," and to help "drive this monster back to his bloody master." Five days after such incitement to action, a crowd of men gathered in Monument Square and burned Bedini in effigy.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> J. Thomas Scharf, *The Chronicles of Baltimore* (Baltimore, 1874), 548; Baltimore *Sun*, July 4, 1853.

<sup>10</sup> L. F. Schmeckebier, "History of the Know Nothing Party in Maryland," in Johns Hopkins University *Studies in Historical and Political Science*, XVII (1899), 61.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Guilday, "Gaetano Bedini," in the United States Catholic Historical Society, *Historical Records and Studies*, XXIII (1933), 135-37; Baltimore *Sun*, January 18, 1854.



Several organizations attempted to capitalize upon this feeling. The United Sons of America instituted in Baltimore in March, 1853, an order similar to that later adopted by the American Party. It differed fundamentally in that it had no political machinery. Many men were to be members of both orders. In August of the same year the United Sons of America held a mass meeting in Baltimore with some five thousand attending.

As in Maryland, Louisiana, with one eighth of its total white population foreign-born or approximately one fourth its white population of foreign origin, continued to be fertile ground for nativistic sentiments. New Orleans particularly felt the impact of the 30,000 or 40,000 immigrants who each year entered the port of New Orleans, many of whom remained.

In 1852, and more especially in 1853, another of the recurrent outbursts was directed against undesirable foreigners, with the Whigs realigned on the "native" side and the Democrats advocating the cause of the immigrants. Dr. P. Scott, a Democrat and minister of the largest Presbyterian church in New Orleans, announced from his pulpit that America was the asylum for the poor downtrodden peoples of Europe, that the citizens of New Orleans should welcome immigrants and help them enter into a full social and equal political life immediately. The *Alexandria Democrat* commended the course of the Irish in Louisiana for not trying to embroil the United States in Irish affairs.

In April, 1854, the New Orleans *Crescent* accepted the gauntlet of battle and answered an attack of the New Orleans *Courier* upon C. Roselieus, a prominent Whig. It denied that he was antagonistic toward all naturalized citizens and asked, "Are we to have 'warm friends of naturalized citizens?' Is there to be a distinction between native born and naturalized citizens?"

On May 22 the following handbill was circulated in New Orleans:

*Citizens of New Orleans!!* You have an important duty to perform tomorrow in the election of a District Attorney. . . . Father Mullen and the Jesuits can not longer rule this city. . . . Mr. Carrell is a *Roman Catholic*, a bigot; all his family are Catholics. He is a man of strong prejudices. All Ireland and Germany would rejoice in his election. He would discharge

every person brought before the Criminal Court provided he is a creole of Ireland or Germany. Americans! Shall we be ruled by Irish and Germans? . . . Give a strong pull . . . and *Carrell will be defeated*. Our power will be shown and in future we can control our own elections without the aid of foreigners.— An American.<sup>12</sup>

The Whigs defended their candidate and deprecated the entrance of religious issues. When the "Naturalized Citizens Association" was created in July, the *Crescent*, speaking for the Whigs, declared: "The project is hostile to the whole spirit of our institutions and can but lead to the stirring up of national animosities and the revival of the old, exploded, and long buried Native American Party. Such a proceeding must of necessity excite jealousy in the natives of the soil, and cause them to band together in hostile opposition to the foreign party as constituted."

In October this paper followed with a long series of denunciations entitled "Abuses of the Naturalization Laws—How it is Done." The articles charged that fraudulent naturalization processes were being repeated; that many appearing for final naturalization had not the qualifications for even the declaration of intention, and after five years of supposed residence could not speak one sentence of English; that men were making their livings by drumming up foreigners to teach them certain dates and facts by rote, and with a few perjuring witnesses, would fraudulently lead them before the judge to be naturalized; that the naturalization papers were not given to the persons seeking naturalization, but to a political (Democratic, of course) clerk to hold until election time to assure the "rightness" of the voter; and that the police themselves hung around the court offering to act as witnesses of identification for anyone who paid them a few cents.

The *Crescent* ignored the threat of the court to fine it for contempt, and warned the public that similar moral conditions had led to the downfall of Rome, when she had admitted, as the United States had done, such large groups "unrefined in manners as they were debased in intellect," advocating "any innovation in government that any daring demagogue cared to lead them into by flattering their appetite for excitement or hope for spoils."

<sup>12</sup> New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, May 23, 1853.

Naturally, such agitation brought about reaction. The more radical element sent a delegation to New York to ask Father Gavazzi to come and repeat his lectures in Louisiana. The conservatives asked for the establishment of a registry law for New Orleans, a constitutional obligation which the legislature had ignored. The proposed law would have made possible a truer expression of public opinion without subjecting it to the highest bidder for the support of the immoral floating class always at hand at the "gateway" of the Mississippi Valley.

The defeat of Charles Gayarré, running for Congress on an independent ticket with Whig support, was occasioned, according to the Whig papers of the state, by such an "amount of bribery and corruption practiced in all directions," that it "cast a gloom over the future prospects of the country." They asserted that a dead foreigner was not dead as long as his naturalization papers could be found, because the Democrats "stood ready by a little lazy swearing to put someone else in his shoes" and thus obtain an additional vote.<sup>13</sup>

Gayarré printed a pamphlet which denounced the recent election frauds. He said that thousands of people, "aghast at the degree of audacity so barefaced and shameless," saw men carried from one poll to another in furniture carts to vote as often as they were ordered. Gayarré claimed that one fourth of the entire New Orleans vote was spuriously cast by individuals under the direction of a "corrupt despotic oligarchy," namely, John Slidell and Émile LeSere. These men, he charged, made an honest man's vote worth one, while a rogue's was worth ten. He asked, "Is this self-government? If we must have a foot on our breast, better be the satin clad one of the Prince and the Queen than that of the scavenger." He demonstrated mathematically that 4,000 of the 13,000 votes cast were fraudulent, as New Orleans had cast only 9,604 votes in the election the year before, yet 13,102 votes were totaled after the population had been diminished by some 20,000 deaths in a recent yellow-fever epidemic, and some 10,000 citizens had temporarily fled from the city.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Baton Rouge Weekly Comet*, November 13, 1853; Gayarré denied a year later that he had ever ceased to be a loyal and stanch Democrat, Charles Gayarré, *To the Editor of the Washington Union* (New York, 1854), *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Gayarré, *Address to the People of the State on the Late Frauds Perpetrated at the Election Held on the 7th November, 1853 in the City of New*

Conditions in New Orleans were such that a reform movement was badly needed. A Grand Jury report showed that many prisoners on the court dockets were not in jail when called up for trial but had been released on bond, or released by order of political bosses and reported "lost." Further, many bonds had been given for serious charges not bailable by law, and accepted when the security was known to be worthless. Naturalization frauds had been continued and the foreign-born citizens controlled the city. It was a bitter dose for many who resented

that a populous and a strong nation should, on its own soil, be governed by a comparative handful of foreigners, ignorant of its laws yet claiming to administer them, and seizing upon its office while yet hardly speaking its language. . . . Can this be just? Ought it to be borne? . . . Are we inferior to even the most uneducated class of the two nations that chiefly lord it over us—the Irish and Germans? . . . The Germans and Italians are quieter, and only raise a riot now and then; but the Irish are forever kicking up rows and breaking heads, getting up mobs, making our elections scenes of violence and fraud, turning . . . the right of suffrage, into . . . a hell's holiday of drunkenness and perjury and bludgeons. . . .<sup>15</sup>

Louisiana had a native free population of 205,474 in 1855. The foreign-born population totaled 66,413, of which 24,266 were from Ireland, 17,507 from Germany, and 11,552 from France. During the first quarter of 1855, 7,173 immigrants entered the port of New Orleans, 3,173 being Germans. These immigrants gathered in certain districts and suburbs such as Lafayette. The mayor of New Orleans was officially informed by the United States Secretary of State that the United States Consul at Bremen had advised him that circulars issued by the emigration bureau in the interior of Germany cautioned emigrants against taking passage for New York as the laws of that state forbade landing except under bond that they would not fall upon the Commissioners for support. All such emigrants were advised to take passage to New

*Orleans* (New Orleans, 1853), *passim*; Baton Rouge *Capitolian Vis A Vis*, December 28, 1853; New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, December 26, 1853.

<sup>15</sup> New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, March 21, 1854.

Orleans or Baltimore where no such regulations existed. The *Crescent*, in noticing the arrival of 175 paupers sent by the Hesse Cassell authorities, said that when they arrived in New Orleans they were so destitute that the citizens had either to see them starve or support them. Such people, it said, should be pitied, but when attention was given to the course of crime pursued in the state by these outcasts, criminals and paupers, it believed something should be done. Another such consignment arrived at New Orleans in August, 1855. Mayor Lewis immediately issued a notice stating the provisions of the Louisiana laws upon pauper and criminal immigration, and he gave warning that these would be strictly enforced.<sup>16</sup>

A Centenary College student writing from Jackson described to his parents a trip he had taken in January of 1854 to Bayou Sara, a port on the Mississippi River above Baton Rouge, telling them of "great multitudes of jabbering and croaking Irish and Dutch."<sup>17</sup>

Many of the Irish and particularly many of the German immigrants, after entering the port of New Orleans, moved up the Mississippi River to Missouri and settled in St. Louis or in its neighboring counties. St. Louis with a population of 77,860 in 1850, found the native-born whites numbering only 36,000 while the foreign born numbered 38,000. Of these the Germans accounted for 23,000 and the Irish 10,000. The Germans migrated in great numbers to the counties of Franklin, Jefferson, Washington, St. Charles, Ste. Genevieve, St. Louis, Cole, Osage, and Gasconade. Other counties with large foreign populations were Benton, Buchanan, Cape Girardeau, Cooper, Jackson, Lafayette, Marion, Montineau, Morgan, Perry, Platte, and Warren.

By 1860 there were 43,464 Irish and 88,487 Germans in Missouri. With nearly 12 per cent of the population, foreigners held the balance of power in the state and became more and more politically aggressive. There is evidence to believe that Thomas Hart

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, March 3, August 14, 1855; *Louisiana State Register*, comprising a *Historical and Statistical Account of Louisiana from Its Earliest Settlement as a Territory, Down to Its Present Period as a State* (Baton Rouge, 1855), 130; *Washington National Intelligencer*, April 19, 1855; Henry P. Dart, *John Blackstone Cotton, 1824-1881* (New York, 1915), 5-6.

<sup>17</sup> Tom Ellis to T. C. Ellis, January 21, 1854, Thomas C. Ellis Papers, Louisiana State Archives.

Benton's efforts to rally his German supporters in his race for Congress in August of 1854 caused such a reaction among native Missourians that the Whig candidate, Luther M. Kennett, was victorious. The election caused serious rioting for several days, necessitating the use of state militia to prevent further loss of life and property.<sup>18</sup> The Irish suffered most with nearly every grog-shop from Broadway to Levee Street being vandalized. Following the riots a citizens' meeting recommended the creation of a purely native-born police force.

Several months later 200 Irish railway workers marched for several miles toward Jefferson City pulling a cannon, with the announced intent of "destroying" a rival group of Irish in the capital.

As in Texas and Maryland, Missouri's large German population included members of the Free Germans or "Red Republicans," who, as foreign freethinkers "asking for Liberty to riot and sell lager beer," were denounced and feared by Anglo-Saxon nativists.

Nativism had long flourished in Kentucky. Here flames were fanned not only by feeling against foreigners but by suspicion and fear of Catholicism. There were in 1850 some 20,000 Catholics in the state and their numbers grew with the increasing numbers of immigrants who settled in the state. An energetic branch of the Protestant Reformation Society which had been formed in Louisville in the early 1840's continued to spur Protestant religious journals to attack "foreign" Catholicism. Even such influential political newspapers as the *Louisville Journal*, edited by George D. Prentice, entered the fray.

Not only Catholic immigrants incurred the wrath of Kentucky nativists, but also the "Godless Germans" who formed the National Central Union of Free Germans with their national headquarters in Louisville. The Germans of Louisville took a very active part in local political affairs. They composed a large percentage of the 30,000 foreign-born citizens within the state in 1850. Foreigners formed 4 per cent of Kentucky's white population.

<sup>18</sup> Huntsville *Independent Missourian*, November 16, 1854; St. Louis *Missouri Cascade*, August 12, 1854; Benjamin Merkel, "The Antislavery Controversy in Missouri," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Washington University, 1939; Billington, *The Protestant Crusade 1800-1860*, 329.

Of all the states in the South, Texas presented specially favorable conditions for the entrance of the American Party. Texas was unusual in that her foreign population, which was large in comparison with most Southern states, was not concentrated in large cities, for Texas had none. She was unusual, too, in that she bordered a foreign country, a condition which presented its own peculiar problems.

The Germans started migrating in numbers to Texas in the early 1840's. Most of the early immigrants came through the leadership of a colonization society which was sponsored by a group of German noblemen. They settled in a section of Texas that was practically uninhabited, and were thus able to form communities that were German in every sense. Not knowing frontier life and customs, not being able to speak English, and having no occasion to learn it, since they lived only in German-speaking communities, they were looked upon with suspicion and distrust by native Texans. Frederick L. Olmsted, in describing his trip through this section of Texas, states that it was like waking from a dream to go into one of the German villages, so different were they from any other section of America.<sup>19</sup>

A close student of this German movement has compared the relative percentage of German population to the native population by counties in the 1850's. He used what he termed "corrected percentages" in which he counted the children of the Germans still residing in the home as foreign-born even though they were native-born. These percentages gave Comal County 85 per cent German inhabitants; other counties ranked: Kendall, 81 per cent; Gillespie, 75 per cent; Kerr County, 50 per cent; Mason County, 46 per cent; Medina County, 36 per cent; Guadalupe County, 22 per cent; Bexar County, 20 per cent; and Travis County, 8 per cent. Bexar County in addition to a 20 per cent German population had a 60 per cent Mexican population.<sup>20</sup>

Olmsted said that he counted only one small settlement of Irish in the state, and that at Refugio. Along the Louisiana border and on the Gulf there was a sprinkling of inhabitants of French and

<sup>19</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey Through Texas* (New York, 1857), 140-80.

<sup>20</sup> R. L. Biese, *The History of the German Settlements in Texas, 1831-1861* (Austin, 1930), 164.

Spanish descent. These were at times referred to as "foreigners."

The Mexicans in Texas were regarded by many Texans as aliens and foreigners although numbers of them antedated the Anglo-Saxons in settlement. A constant flow of the lower class back and forth across the border aggravated the situation. Olmsted estimated that in 1856 there were many more than 25,000 Mexicans in the state, in San Antonio 4,000, in the lower Rio Grande region 3,000, in El Paso and the Presidio 8,500, and some 3,000 "floating."

The German settlers in Texas generally supported the Democratic Party, believing it to be the party of true republicanism. Comal, Gillespie, and Medina counties, for example, cast only 10 votes out of 248 for Winfield Scott in 1852. They were growing more and more dissatisfied with Democracy at the turn of the decade, however, because they feared the party was leading toward disunion. The Union was of greater importance to them than any question of slavery, abolition, or party allegiance.

In 1853 a call was issued for the formation of a political club, the Demokratischer Verein, later changed to a social club with political discussion, the Geselliger Verein. The same year saw the founding of Der Freie Verein, which probably was part of the national association founded at Louisville. Two of these clubs functioned regularly in Gillespie County.

Each spring the Germans were accustomed to holding music festivals at San Antonio. When they met in 1854, a Freie Verein political convention was also held. A series of resolutions was published in German. The *Neu Braunsfelser Zeitung* of April 21, 1854, when issuing a call for this convention, had said it was time to see that Germans received the recognition in political affairs that their numbers and intelligence warranted. After debate it was decided not to attempt to form a new German Party but to speak forth as Americans. Delegates were appointed to attend a national convention in St. Louis in November, 1854, and funds were raised for this purpose. Their resolutions began:

In as much as we are of the conviction that the people of the United States have not enjoyed the freedom which their government provides them, nor have they taken the place



which their power and expansion entitled them among the nations of the world.

In as much as we have discovered that the organized parties have neither the will nor the power to better the political, social, and religious conditions of the people of the United States, we have United ourselves under this statement of principle.

The lengthy platform which followed, after commending the American government as the best in existence, recommended under the heading of political reforms direct election of president, senators, judges, tax collectors, and all administrative officers except cabinet officers; tenure of office according to merit and not by the spoils system; removal of the residence requirement of officeholding; recall of public officials; active aid to foreign republican states; protection to Americans abroad; maintenance of the Monroe Doctrine; and a strong navy and army in which only citizens could serve and in which there should be no corporal punishment; and opportunity through cadet schools for citizens to obtain training as officers.

Under "social reforms" the platform demanded: simplification of legal forms and justice so that lawyers would not be necessary; abolition of the grand jury, temperance laws, capital punishment, and imprisonment for debt; laws encouraging equality of labor and capital, and free immigration. They declared slavery an evil, but purely a state problem.

The platform recommended: free land to the settler, graduated income and progressive inheritance taxes, internal improvements, few restrictions in trade, free public-school books, abolition of religious textbooks and ministerial teachers, compulsory education, abolition of all Sunday restrictions, religious oaths, etc.<sup>21</sup>

These visionary statements met a cold reception by the Texans and were to furnish the Texas Americans with unlimited ammunition in their campaigns. They did not, however, represent the sentiments of all the Germans. The editor of the *Neu Braunsfelser*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 195-99; Austin *Texas State Times*, June 14, 1856; E. W. Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties in Texas* (Austin, 1916), 58; Laura Crews, "The Know Nothing Party in Texas," unpublished master's thesis, University of Texas, 1925, 48, 54.

*Zeitung*, May 26, 1854, said that the convention did not represent the Germans of Texas, who, he said, were friends of the slaveholders of the state. Later discussion indicated that the editor feared that if the Germans were hostile to the slaveowners a combination of slaveowners and nativists would deprive them of suffrage rights.

The Democrats who defended the Germans gave additional arguments to support this view. The Germans did not ordinarily own slaves. They failed to support Adolph Douai, the editor of the abolitionist San Antonio *Zeitung*, and he soon became a bankrupt.

The presence of a large group of Mexican peons and the proximity of Texas to Mexico presented an acute problem to the slaveowners. The poorer Mexican freely associated with the Negroes, told them that in Mexico they would find class equality, and gave them encouragement and aid in escaping. To pursue and capture such runaway slaves was almost an impossible task. It was therefore natural that various community associations were formed to give the plantation owners protection. Such a meeting at Seguin, in August of 1854, appointed a committee to attempt to prevent the entrance of any more Mexicans into that county.

Several meetings were also held in Austin. One on October 7, 1854, recommended the removal of the Mexican population if necessary. A more general meeting was held in Gonzales on October 23 with representatives from nine counties. Vigilante committees were organized and a petition was sent to Congress asking action.

Although condemned by the Democrats, the activities of the French socialist, Victor Considérant of Paris, also were to give additional local strength to the Americans. He conceived the idea of establishing a socialistic colony in north Texas. In the spring of 1855 he and Albert Brisbane, a leader of the Fourier socialists, visited Gainesville and northern Texas. In 1855 he returned with a number of colonists. The rumors of larger numbers arriving caused considerable opposition among the slaveowning element in Texas. Some of the north Texan papers condoned the colony as tending to increase land values.

In contrast to Texas, the state of Tennessee seemingly had few

incentives for nativism. There were only 6,000 or 7,000 foreigners with a ratio to the native population of about 1 to 130. In Memphis there were 4,000 Irish and 1,400 Germans. Here they equaled over 30 per cent of the total population, or 42 per cent of the white inhabitants.<sup>22</sup> The small number of Catholic churches was not necessarily an important deterrent to the rise of anti-Catholic feeling. As a Southern state, as a part of the great America, Tennessee could take the burden of others upon her shoulders, and this she attempted to do. Two German papers started publication in the state in 1854, the Memphis *Die Stimmmedie Volks* and the Nashville *Turn Verein*. In 1858 the Memphis *Der Anzeiger des Sudens* appeared.

There were only 3,600 foreign-born residents of Arkansas in 1860. It was perhaps the state's exposed position adjacent to territory filling up with immigrants hostile to slavery that made her at all receptive to nativism.

In Mississippi in 1850 the 4,788 foreigners provided an even smaller group among Mississippi's 206,648 white citizens than had the foreign-born in Arkansas. Yet in Mississippi the Whigs had made some attempts to nurse antinativism since the election of 1844, largely on religious grounds. By 1860 the Catholics had established churches in a number of Mississippi cities and a convent at Vicksburg, which were served by a bishop and twelve priests.<sup>23</sup>

Georgia had an even lesser percentage of foreigners in the state, 6,452 to 521,575 natives. There were relatively few Catholics within the state. Savannah had probably the greatest concentration of foreigners and Catholics. Some 21 per cent of its total population were foreigners. This actually equaled 33 per cent of the total white population. Of these the Irish numbered 3,100. There had been a recent serious attempt made by General Brisbane to settle purely Catholic communities in Baker, Donley, and Early counties. The projects had been dedicated to St. Ignatius and endorsed by the presiding bishop, and literature had been distributed in Europe to obtain emigrants. Irish labor built a

<sup>22</sup> Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Dunbar Rowland, *Encyclopedia of Mississippi History*, 2 vols. (Madison, 1907), II, 278-80; James E. Walmsley, "The Presidential Campaign of 1844 in Mississippi," in *Mississippi Historical Society Publications*, II (1906), 186.

forty-mile railroad to aid in settlement, but the project collapsed. As nearly all the priests serving in the South were foreign-born,<sup>24</sup> their presence, even in a limited number, seemed to confirm the dark hints of sinister foreign control of the American Catholic Church.

Mobile, Alabama, had an even greater concentration of foreign-born than had Savannah. Only New Orleans in the South exceeded Mobile in the percentage of its foreign-born population in ratio to its native white inhabitants. Some 25 per cent of the total population were foreign-born, of several different nationalities. As Mobile stood to Alabama, as St. Louis to Missouri, or Baltimore to Maryland, antinativism there had political repercussions over the entire state. Other cities with observable foreign populations were Montgomery, with about 6.5 per cent; Selma, which received some 300 German families between 1852 and 1860; and Wetumpka, where on January 26, 1851, one steamboat alone brought 270 Irish settlers.

Virginia, whose control by the nativists would have meant much in gaining prestige and strength in the South, had 35,058 foreign-born within the state in 1860. Over 10,000 of them were German, and over 16,000 Irish. Of Richmond's 37,910 inhabitants in 1860, 4,956 were of foreign origin, totaling 13 per cent, largely of German birth.<sup>25</sup> Olmstead wrote of this foreign element in Richmond: "There is a very considerable population of foreign origin generally of the least valuable class; very dirty German Jews especially abound, and their characteristic shops (with their characteristic smells, quite as bad as Cologne), are thickly set in the narrowest and meanest streets, which seem to be otherwise inhabited mainly by negroes."<sup>26</sup> In 1850 there were so many German-speaking people in the valley section of Virginia that the constitutional convention of that year printed many of its documents in German. In 1857, 5,000 of the 20,000 copies of the message of the governor of Missouri were printed in German.

<sup>24</sup> O'Connell, *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia: Leaves of Its History*, 119-21, 488.

<sup>25</sup> Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, 2-3, 7-8, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, with Remarks on their Economy* (New York, 1856), 51.

In Florida and North Carolina little grounds for nativism existed. South Carolina, on the other hand, despite the strangle hold of the Democratic Party on political activity within the state, in some respects was a more fertile field in which to plant American seed. There were some 40,000 foreign immigrants to South Carolina between 1840 and 1860. One company of Germans purchased 16,000 acres of land for settlement in 1849. Foreign-born inhabitants equaled over 15 per cent of the total population, or 30 per cent of the white population. Too, South Carolina had been an early center of Catholic publications. The first strictly religious journal established in the United States in defense of Catholic doctrine, the *United States Catholic Miscellany*, was published in Charleston. The *Charleston Irishman and Southern Democrat* and the *Charleston Southern Religious Telegraph* were examples of other journalistic efforts of Catholics in the state. Here also Bishop John England had lived, written, and started controversies that lasted until the war.

## CHAPTER THREE

# ORIGIN AND RITUAL OF THE NATIONAL PARTY

**I**N 1849-1850 in New York City Charles B. Allen organized the Order of the Star Spangled Banner with forty charter members. Thoroughly nativistic, stringently secret, its purpose and practice was to control nominations rather than carry elections.

In 1852 new leaders, headed by James W. Barker, a dry goods merchant, took control and merged it with a newly organized American Party, or, as it was popularly to be known, the "Know-Nothing Party." In this study the two names will be used interchangeably with precisely the same meaning. The exact steps of the transition are somewhat cloudy as the details of the formation of the American Party were (and still are) shrouded with that mystery of which the early party was so proud.<sup>1</sup> There is even doubt as to the names of the leaders. J. B. McMaster and Edward Stanwood<sup>2</sup> say that the party broke away from the United Americans because their ritual forbade participation in politics—demonstrably an error. The *Whig Almanac* gave the party as "new in origin" with the probable name of "The Sons of '76" or "The Order of the Star Spangled Banner."<sup>3</sup> A. C. Cole and James Ford Rhodes assert this to be so.<sup>4</sup> Rhodes depended upon J.P.

<sup>1</sup> Whitney, *Defense of the American Policy*, 280-85; *Harper's*, V (August, 1852), 554; C. F. Brand, "History of the Know Nothing Party in Indiana," in *Indiana Magazine of History*, XVII (1922), 52.

<sup>2</sup> J. B. McMaster, *History of the People of the United States*, 8 vols. (New York, 1926), VII, 83; Edward Stanwood, *A History of Presidential Elections* (New York, 1892), 193; J. Frederick Essary, *Maryland in National Politics* (Baltimore, 1915), 200.

<sup>3</sup> *Whig Almanac*, 1855, 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Cole, *Whig Party in the South*, 308; James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850 to the End of the Roosevelt Administration*, 9 vols. (New York, 1928), II, 10.

Hambleton's<sup>5</sup> partisan and inaccurate account of the campaign for a great deal of his information about the American Party. L. F. Schmeckebier says that the recording secretary of the National Council and several surviving members of the party had assured him personally that the official name always was the "American Party." In fact, the New York *Herald* spoke of it as the American Party as early as the election of 1852.<sup>6</sup> L. D. Scisco repeats Rhodes's error about the origin and intimates that the party was strengthened in New York by the accession of several nativistic groups. In view of his statement that in 1852 there were sixty different nativistic bodies in Brooklyn and New York City alone, coalitions could have been expected. The Democrats and other opponents created fanciful origins, ranging through madmen, Ned Buntline, the Federalists, and abolitionists, to a "Whig trick," as it suited their convenience. Informal organization probably occurred in 1853. The ritual was officially drawn up in New York in June, 1854, and revised at Cincinnati on November 15 of the same year. All sections of the nation are known to have been represented at the latter meeting.

Many purported extracts from, and copies of, the Constitution and Ritual of the American Party were printed and reprinted by the newspapers of the day. The authenticity of these was asserted by the Democratic papers to be certain. The American organs at first denied them as hoaxes, pointing out that there were many versions, each differing from the other. Despite these discrepancies there is little doubt that, through perjury by dissatisfied members, spies, and even "unofficial releases" by leading Americans, there were fairly authentic copies published. The ritual used by Henry A. Wise in his Virginia campaign was most widely accepted by the Democrats. It had been sent to him by the Indiana Democrats.

Parson William G. Brownlow, a leading member of the Tennessee Council, admitted the genuineness of the American oaths as published in the Reverend Aaron Brown's "Letter to the Ministers of the Methodist Church South." Two prominent American papers in Virginia copied the Third Degree ritual from the

<sup>5</sup> J. P. Hambleton, *Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise, With a History of the Political Campaign in Virginia* (Richmond, 1856).

<sup>6</sup> New York *Herald*, October 28, 1852.

Pittsburgh *Gazette*, admitting its authenticity. The Richmond *Penny Post* tacitly admitted the validity of the whole constitution exposed by Henry A. Wise by saying: "For our part, we are glad that there has been a scoundrel among us, and that scoundrel has made this publication. The people can now see the very utmost of the objects of this association." A few issues later, perhaps on second thought, the editor denied that he had acknowledged this exposure, except for the sake of "an argument."

The New Orleans *Crescent* challenged the opposition to print the copy of the Louisiana ritual which they had obtained when a copy had been lost or stolen in Vermilion Parish. A secret call for a state Know-Nothing convention in North Carolina which was published by the Democrats carries internal evidence that the published rituals were substantially correct. An officially published call for a special meeting of the National Council lends additional credence,<sup>7</sup> as do the numerous private and official communications, manuscript and printed forms, preserved in the papers of Governor W. B. Campbell, president of the Tennessee American Party during its greatest strength. Although the writer has never been able to locate an official copy of the Constitution and Ritual, either national or state, there is reasonable assurance that the following account of the organization is substantially correct.

The Constitution and Ritual were drawn up by a meeting in New York City in June of 1854. Slight revision and amendments were made by the second National Council which was held in Cincinnati, November 15, 1854. It was here the "Third Degree" or "Union Degree" was added at the instigation of its author, Kenneth Rayner of North Carolina. Other minor amendments were made from time to time.

The new party was organized as a secret lodge, with all the paraphernalia of secret signs, grips, secret sessions with sentinels posted, passwords, solemn oaths and ceremonies, and various degrees of membership. The whole was carried on with great seriousness, no "horseplay" being considered. The most complete and reliable copies of the ritual that correspond to the sources

<sup>7</sup> Raleigh *North Carolina Weekly Standard*, November 7, 1855; Frankfort *Commonwealth*, December 4, 1855.



discussed above are to be found in the work of M. W. Cluskey, and that of T. V. Cooper and H. T. Fenton. They are identical in content, though differing in a few minor details of translations of code passwords. While neither gives his authority, the works contain not only the purported exact ritual, but also blank forms to be used in transacting official business. The article and section citations that are made in the following description refer to those contained in rituals as given by these authors.<sup>8</sup>

At the top was the National Council, not to be confused with the National Convention. The National Council was composed of seven delegates from each state council and two from each district or territorial council. These delegates received from the national treasury three dollars per day and five cents a mile travel allowance. No state could cast more votes for a presidential candidate than it had electoral votes. Thirty-two members from thirteen states constituted a quorum. This council had the power to fix and establish all the signs, grips, passwords, and such other secret work as it thought necessary, and could decide all matters of national politics, and could adopt every measure it deemed necessary to secure the success of the organization.

The National Council chartered state, territorial, and district councils that were responsible to it for regular reports on membership and payment of dues collected. The National Council was the supreme court and arbiter for the whole party. The national officers annually elected were a president, vice-president, chaplain, corresponding secretary, and recording secretary. To be eligible for office in the party, national or local, a candidate must have taken all three degrees.

The National Council received from the state councils four cents per capita each year for each member enrolled. If the membership of 1,500,000 as given by Rhodes is accurate, or even using the figure of 875,000 (the number of votes received by Fillmore), the annual dues should have been between \$35,000 and \$60,000.

Evidently these funds or sufficient funds were not regularly paid into the national treasury, for on June 16, 1856, the "National Executive Committee" sent to each "State Executive Com-

<sup>8</sup> Cluskey, *Political Text-Book or Encyclopedia*, 47-58; T. V. Cooper and H. T. Fenton, *American Politics* (Philadelphia, 1882), 57-68.

mittee" a printed letter regarding local activity during the campaign of 1856 in which the following statement was made: "In regard to funds—so essential to successful political results—we merely request that for the purpose of enabling us to spread documents before your people, you shall supply us at your earliest convenience, and through such instrumentalities as you may yourselves adopt, with such amount as you think may be necessary." <sup>9</sup>

Under the National Council were the state, district, and territorial councils. Each state was required to have five local or subordinate chapters before it could receive its charter. These state councils, subject to the National Council, made their own by-laws and had exclusive rights in chartering. With the exception of Virginia and the "to be" West Virginia, no state was allowed more than one state council. The special status of the western part of Virginia was never publicly explained.

The Constitution declared that "the object of this organization shall be to protect every American citizen in the legal and proper exercise of all his civil and religious rights and privileges; to resist the insidious policy of the Church of Rome, and all other foreign influence against our republican institutions in all lawful ways; and to place in all offices . . . none but native born Protestant citizens . . . and to protect and uphold the Union of these States."

A person to be eligible for membership had to be twenty-one years of age, believe in a Supreme Being, be a native-born Protestant and, in most states, not married to a Catholic. The Protestant clause was disregarded almost entirely in several states in the South, notably Louisiana, Maryland, Alabama, and Mississippi. Some sources state that five votes were sufficient to blackball a candidate. One third of those present was the more usual practice. A delay of three weeks between the first and second degrees and three months between the second and third degrees was necessary unless the time was shortened by a special dispensation in order to facilitate the inception of a new subordinate council.

The Constitution of the North Carolina State Council as published in full in the Democratic Raleigh *North Carolina Weekly Standard* was probably typical of organizations in other states.

<sup>9</sup> Circular letter from National Executive Committee to state executive committees, June 16, 1856, David Campbell Papers, Duke University.

The State Council was composed of two elected delegates from each subordinate council. Its powers, subject to those of the National Council,<sup>10</sup> included establishing passwords and other secret works, the levying of taxes, the granting of dispensations for new subcouncils upon application of thirteen members in good standing, and the calling, through the president of the State Council, of regular and special meetings. The State Council annually elected a president, vice-president, secretary-treasurer, marshal, chaplain, inside sentinel, and outside sentinels.

Members of the order who failed to vote for the candidate nominated by the party, but did not vote for his opponent, were to be warned for the first offense, and expelled for the second. American members of the state legislature failing to vote for a party candidate were to be reported to their individual subcouncils for discipline unless excused by a three-fourths vote after trial by the State Council and upon a promise not to so offend again.

A subcouncil expelling a member notified the state president, who notified all other subcouncils, and by the use of printed forms labeled and punished him as a perjurer and traitor, unworthy of the notice or regard of good men. It should be noted that there was a decided difference between a withdrawal and a dismissal.

The subordinate councils paid five dollars for the "entire work of the Order, including the Ritual, the Constitution of the National Council, and the Constitution of the State Council." Each subordinate council was to collect twenty-five cents a year from each member unless he was unable to pay. Subordinate councils in North Carolina paid four cents per member each May for transmission to the national headquarters. Texas subordinate councils at one time paid ten cents per capita annually. The California party had no dues.<sup>11</sup>

Political nominations for state-wide officials were made either

<sup>10</sup> President Bartlett officially revoked the charter of the State Council of Ohio and organized a new Council because the original Council had repudiated Fillmore, *Washington Weekly American Organ*, April 5, 1856. Something of a similar nature must have happened when the "Blue Lodges" were denied further recognition in Louisiana, Overdyke, "American Party in Louisiana," *loc. cit.*, XV, 265.

<sup>11</sup> Hurt, "The Rise and Fall of the 'Know Nothings' in California," *loc. cit.*, 38n.; *San Antonio Texan*, July 21, 1855; *Raleigh Weekly Standard*, November 7, 1855.

by the state council or by a specially called nominating convention. For those offices filled by the state's General Assembly, such as United States Senator, secretary of state, attorney general, treasurer, judges, etc., the state councils made the nominations, unless this duty was delegated to a legislative caucus. Congressional, district, and ward conventions met and nominated their respective candidates.

The national constitution made it mandatory upon state and local councils to punish those who, without authorization, used the secret signs for notification of a meeting or posted them at any other time than between midnight and a half hour before dawn. This signal was often reported to be a white triangle of paper. When this triangle was red it meant danger. If there was a small triangle cut from the base of the larger red one, it signified actual trouble and that members should come to the meeting armed. These red signals, at times in the shape of hearts, were used occasionally.<sup>12</sup>

The first oath required of all candidates joining the order was designed to control the member as a voter. The initiate affirmed the following solemn pledge which was read to him in open meeting:

You and each of you of your own free will and accord, in the presence of Almighty God and these witnesses do solemnly promise and swear that you will never betray any of the secrets of this society, nor communicate them even to proper candidates, except within a lawful council of the Order; that you will never permit any of the secrets of this society to be written, or in any other manner to be made legible except for the purpose of official instruction; that you will not vote, nor give your influence for any man for any office in the gift of the people, unless he be an American-born citizen, in favor of Americans ruling America, nor if he be a Roman Catholic; that you will in all political matters, so far as this Order is concerned, comply with the will of the majority, though it may conflict with your personal preference, so long as it does not conflict with the Constitution of the United States of America

<sup>12</sup> Raleigh *Weekly Standard*, May 2, 16, 1855; Frankfort *Weekly Kentucky Yeoman*, April 11, 1856; Austin *Texas State Gazette*, August 11, 1856; the *Yeoman* relates sworn evidence to this effect in court.

or that of the state in which you reside; that you will not, under any circumstance whatever, knowingly recommend an unworthy person for initiation, nor suffer it to be done, if it is in your power to prevent it; that you will not under any circumstance expose the name of any member of this order, nor reveal the existence of such an association; that you will answer an *imperative notice* issued by the proper authority, obey the command of the state council president, or his deputy, while assembled by such notice, and respond to the claim or *sign* or *cry* of the order, unless it be physically impossible; and that you will acknowledge the State Council of ——— as the legislative head, the ruling authority and the supreme tribunal of the order in the state of ——— acting under the jurisdiction of the National Council of the United States of North America. Binding yourself in the penalty of excommunication from the order, the forfeiture of all intercourse with its members, and being denounced in all the societies of the same, as a willful traitor to your God and to your country.

The Second Degree was to bind those who became eligible to political officeholding and to enforce party principles by requiring:

You and each of you, of your own free will and accord, in the presence of Almighty God and these witnesses, your left hand extended to the flag of your country, do solemnly and sincerely swear that you will not under any circumstances, disclose in any manner, nor suffer it to be done by others, if in your power to prevent it, the name, signs, passwords, or other secrets of this degree, except in open Council for the purpose of instruction; that you will in all things conform to all the rules and regulations of this order, and to the Constitution and by-laws of this or any other council to which you may be attached so long as they do not conflict with the Constitution of the United States, nor that of the State in which you reside; that you will under all circumstances, if in your power so to do, attend to all regular signs or summons that may be shown or sent to you by a brother of this or any other degree of this order; that you will support in all political matters, for all political offices, members of this order in preference to other

persons; that if it may be done legally, you will, when elected or appointed to any official station conferring on you the power to do so, remove all foreigners, aliens, or Roman Catholics from office or place, and that you will in no case appoint such to any office or place in your gift. You do also promise and swear that this, and all other obligations which you have previously taken in this order shall ever be kept through life sacred and inviolate. All this you promise and declare, as Americans, to sustain and abide by, without hesitation or mental reservation whatever. So help you God, and keep you steadfast.

The Third Degree, a concession to the Southern slaveholder, was intended to capitalize on the strong Union sentiment present in all sections. It read:

You, and each of you, of your own free will and accord, in the presence of Almighty God and these witnesses, with your hands joined in token of that fraternal affection which should ever bind together the States of the Union—forming a ring, in token of your determination that, so far as your efforts can avail, this Union shall have no end—do solemnly and sincerely swear (or affirm) that you will not under any circumstances disclose in any manner, nor suffer it to be done by others, if in your power to prevent it, the name, signs, passwords or other secrets of this degree, except to those whom you may prove on trial to be brothers of the same degree, or in open council for the purpose of instruction; that you do hereby solemnly declare your devotion to the Union of these States; that in the discharge of your duties as an American citizen you will uphold, maintain, and defend it; that you will discourage and discountenance any and every attempt, coming from any and every quarter, which you believe to be designed or calculated to destroy or subvert it, or to weaken its bonds; and that you will use your influence, as far as in your power, in endeavoring to procure an amicable and equitable adjustment of all political discontents and differences, which may threaten its injury or overthrow. You do further promise and swear (or affirm) that you will not vote for any one to fill any office of honor, profit, or trust of a political character, whom you know or believe to be in favor of a dissolution of the Union of

these States, or who is endeavoring to produce that result; that you will vote for and support for all political offices third or union degree members of this Order in preference to all others; that if it may be done consistently with the Constitution and laws of the land you will, when elected or appointed to official station which may confer on you the power to do so, remove from office or place all persons whom you know or believe to be in favor of a dissolution of the Union, or are endeavoring to produce that result; and that you will in no case appoint any such persons to any political office or place whatever. All this you promise and swear (or affirm) upon your honor as American citizens and friends of the American Union, to sustain and abide by without any hesitation or mental reservation whatever. You also promise and swear (or affirm) that this and all other obligations which you have previously taken in this Order, shall ever be kept sacred and inviolate. To all this you pledge your lives, your fortunes, and your sacred honors. So help you God and keep you steadfast!

The editor of the *Richmond Penny Post* said that the first degree told the danger, the second showed how to meet that danger, and the third reinforced the warnings and averted the terrible danger of disunion.

Certain signs were used to enable fellow members to recognize each other, such as scratching an eye with the right forefinger and when gripping the hand pressing with the middle finger upon the lowest joint of the other finger. This was supposed to bring the reply of "Where did you get that?" The answer being "I don't know," to which the other returned, "I don't know either." Another purported sign was to place the hand between the buttons of the shirt or coat and elevate the thumb.

The signs for admission into the lodges, wigwams, or meeting rooms, as a few of the states called their councils, were various combinations of rapid knocks on the outer doors and whispered passwords such as "What meets here tonight?" The reply of "I don't know" was answered by "I am one." Similar words and signs were demanded at other doors if the meeting hall had such doors available. The president of the council was supposed to be saluted on entering by the placing of the right hand upon the heart, and then letting it fall to the side. Such phrases as "York-

town, the place of final victory," "The Sons of '76," "Put none but Americans on Guard tonight," were typical passwords.

All members professed ignorance of the party and were instructed to reply "I don't know" to all questions, thus gaining the name "Know-Nothing" for the party. This name, while never appearing as the official name of the party, was often accepted by the party membership. Scisco believes that the first time the name appeared in print was in the *New York Tribune*, November 10, 1853.



## CHAPTER FOUR

# THE WHIGS MAKE WAY FOR THE AMERICANS

**T**HE COMPROMISE of 1850, largely wrought by Southern Whigs, marks the beginning of the end of the Whig Party in the South. For a time in 1850 and 1851, many Whigs were hopefully feeling a new and false strength rising from the formation of "Union" parties in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. There was only one difficulty to overcome, that of slavery, and this issue they hoped they could exclude.

In Georgia, where the Whigs had only three of that state's eight representatives to the Thirty-first Congress (1849-1851), the passage of the Compromise of 1850 and the enunciation of the Georgia Platform caused the dissolution of party lines. The acceptance of the Compromise of 1850, incorporated in the Georgia Platform, was supported by practically all the Whigs and a large portion of the Democrats. Under the leadership of Robert Toombs, Alexander Stephens, and Howell Cobb, the Constitutional Union Party took shape. Cobb had been a Democrat and Toombs and Stephens had been Whigs. In a contest with the Southern Rights group, Cobb was elected to the governorship.

In Alabama during the discussion of the Compromise the Whigs joined with the Democrats of the state to form the Southern Rights Party and the Union Party. Similar joint action was taken halfheartedly in Mississippi.

The new party realignments were only temporary. In August of 1852 the Georgia Executive Committee announced its decision to disband the Constitutional Union Party. Cobb led out his Democratic followers, while Stephens and Toombs rallied the Whigs. Their gubernatorial candidate, Charles J. Jenkins, running as a Unionist Whig, was defeated by some 500 votes. This

was the last real effort made by the Georgia Whigs. They refused to support Winfield Scott in 1852 by voting for the deceased Daniel Webster and were now in a position of helplessness. As some 5,800 Georgia Democrats had also bolted their party by voting an independent ticket, there was some possibility that these two groups might be welded into effective political opposition.<sup>1</sup>

In Alabama, despite the opposition of some of the Democratic and Whig leaders of the Unionist Party, the Democratic Party was re-formed in 1852 in order to send a Democratic Senator to Washington.

In 1853 the Mississippi Whigs made desperate efforts to recover their prestige and to reorganize their forces. Forced to concede Democratic supremacy in national affairs, they turned to local issues to renew the struggle, throwing their wholehearted support behind the re-election of the two Union congressmen and one of their own Whig Union contestants who were opposing the State Rights candidates. Although the elections were close in the First and Second Districts, the Democrats won these two as well as the Third District. In the Fourth District there was no opposition to the State Rights Democracy.<sup>2</sup>

In other states in the South the stopgap cry of "finality of the Compromise" provided some false strength to the Whigs. In Virginia the nationalistic and state-rights wings were temporarily united. In North Carolina, Florida, Missouri, Tennessee, and Louisiana the party retained strength and some vigor. In Kentucky the party continued its control of the state, electing 5 of the 10 congressmen, 23 of 38 state senators, and 55 of the 110 state representatives in 1852.

In some of the states the last efforts of the Whigs were made in the election of 1852, as in Alabama, where apathy was marked. The following year the Whig nominee for governor refused to enter the race. The Democratic majority reached 15,000, partially because the conservative Whigs of the black belt again, as they had in 1852, refused to appear at the polls. Alabama Democrats used their 79-to-54 majority in the state legislature to gerry-

<sup>1</sup> Louis Biles Hill, *Joseph E. Brown and the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill, 1939), 2; U. B. Phillips, *The Southern Whigs 1834-1854* (New York, 1910), 223-29, a reprint from *Turner Essays in American History*.

<sup>2</sup> Cole, *Whig Party in the South*, 279-85; *Whig Almanac*, 1854, 48.

mander the Whig counties of the black belt into fewer senatorial districts and increased the number of Democratic districts of northern Alabama. The Whigs lost in their contentions for representation on total population, black and white. They had based their demands on the ground that slave counties paid four times the taxes of the remainder of the state. The Whigs who had controlled North Carolina from 1836 to 1850 found themselves coping with a newly invigorated Democratic Party. In contrast to the situation in most of the other Southern states, the North Carolina Whigs were not composed of the slaveholding element. The strength of the party lay in the western part of the state, and some portions of the central part. Here, though slavery predominated, the Whigs were at times popular because they stressed the need for internal improvements. Until their decline they had led in favoring popular education, state aid to the railroads, a protective tariff, and Unionism.

By 1853 it was evident that North Carolina Whig leaders had lost touch with the common people. The Democrats had a better understanding of the changing times and the fibers of popular sentiment. In many respects the leaders of the Democratic Party were aristocratic, yet much less so than those of the Whigs. The *Raleigh Register* pointed out that young Whigs had little incentive to devote their energies to the cause when they never got a promotion. To many North Carolinians the national Democracy seemed more alive to Southern interests in the contests over the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Bill.<sup>3</sup>

While the Tennessee Whigs did not suffer comparatively as great a rout as did those in other Southern states in the presidential election of 1852, yet they were in a difficult position. Their 1,900-vote majority for Scott faded into a defeat of 2,200 votes in the gubernatorial race the next year. They elected only five of the ten Federal congressmen. They managed to retain control of the state legislature by a slim majority of twelve, and were thus able to return John Bell to the Senate.

<sup>3</sup> W. K. Boyd, "North Carolina on the Eve of Secession," in *American Historical Association Annual Report 1910* (Washington, 1922), 165-77; *Raleigh Weekly Register*, September 13, 20, 27, 1854; [W. W. Holden], *Memoirs of W. W. Holden*, Trinity College Historical Society, *Historical Papers*, XI (1911), 10.

This loss of ground was not so much due to the increasing strength and activity of the Tennessee Democrats as it was to the fact that the Whig Party lost so much ground nationally that they suffered locally.

Virginia Whigs were troubled by internal division. A schism had started when John Minor Botts and his followers had quarreled with John Pendleton, Thomas S. Flournoy, W. L. Goggin, and W. S. Preston and their followers. Each faction was more willing to see Democrats victorious than to make concessions to the other. Drifting into nationalistic and state-rights wings they were only temporarily united by the Compromise of 1850.

Another factor unbalancing the political situation in Virginia was the increased strength granted the western part of the state by the new constitution of 1852. The western counties with a population of 100,000 more than the Tidewater had not won their struggle completely and were attempting to have the legislative apportionment based upon population rather than upon counties. The east wanted representation based upon the "mixed," or population and property, basis. The west wanted the "white" basis so that they might reapportion taxation to bear more heavily upon the slaveowner, and in order that they might spend state money for schools and roads which the Piedmont needed. Virginia's system of apportionment, badly needing rectification, gave more weight to \$132,000 in taxes than to 94,000 people.<sup>4</sup>

The Democrats, who were more in touch with the people and who seemed more in favor of reform, grew in popularity. The new constitution helped them, since "the young men who had become voters for the first time, under the new Constitution, as a general rule voted the Democratic ticket because they believed they were indebted to the Democratic Party for this privilege." Other young men with political ambitions saw that if they wished political office they would have to court the favor of these new "unwashed suffragans."

The eastern section was under the political control of the old Whig planters. "The Whigs," it was said, "knew each other by

<sup>4</sup> H. T. Shanks, *Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847-1861* (Richmond, 1934), 48-49; J. C. McGregor, *The Disruption of Virginia* (New York, 1922), 45-69; Barton H. Wise, *The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia, 1806-1876* (New York, 1899), 152.

the instinct of a gentleman." John Syme, editor of the Petersburg *Intelligencer*, when asked whether a Democrat was a gentleman, would tap his snuffbox significantly and reply: "Well, he is apt not to be; but if he is, he is in damned bad company." The legend of blue blood hurt the Whigs and contributed to their downfall.<sup>5</sup>

The Whigs of Maryland, as in many other Southern states, found their chief support among the planter class. These resided mostly in the Tidewater region. Through their historical control of representation, though inferior in numbers, they had been able to prevent for decades any marked modification of the constitution of 1776. Their conservatism feared adverse slave and tax legislation, and the growing strength of Baltimore. This city had roughly one fourth of the state's population. Before 1850 they had only one sixteenth of the representatives; the new constitution gave them one eighth. After the new constitution was put into effect, the Whigs of the state rapidly lost ground.

The Whigs of Louisiana carrying the state elections of 1852 found themselves faced with the question of calling a new constitutional convention. Reversing their stand in the convention of 1845, in 1852 they led in reducing the length of residence requirements for the voters to one year and a half in the state and six months in the parish.<sup>6</sup>

However, in the same year the Whigs lost the presidential and gubernatorial contests after very listless campaigns. The Whigs claimed the elections were not a true test of their strength, as party lines were not sharply defined. They were, however, to be the last great efforts of the Whigs in Louisiana.

Unionism had added strength to the powerful Whig Party of Missouri, and though Pierce carried the state, the Whigs obtained control of the state legislature and sent H. S. Geyer to the Senate. Late in 1853 the state was redistricted for two new congressmen with James J. Lindley and Samuel Caruthers successfully gaining seats with their fellow Whigs, John G. Miller and Mordecai Oliver. The Missouri Whigs as a whole favored the

<sup>5</sup> John Goode, *Recollections of a Life Time* (New York, 1906), 28; J. H. Claiborne, *Seventy-Five Years in Old Virginia* (New York, 1904), 28, 131.

<sup>6</sup> *Harper's*, V (October, 1852), 695.

Kansas-Nebraska Bill. A new state-rights faction headed by George W. Goode and W. P. Darnes opposed the free-soil Whigs under the aegis of James S. Rollins and Henry T. Blow.

In 1854 the Whigs selected five of their seven candidates for Congress. Thomas Hart Benton's advice to his supporters to vote for Whigs rather than Democrats who stood for the Baltimore Convention of 1852, was responsible for the false apparent strength of the Whig minority.<sup>7</sup> Failing to elect the Whig A. W. Doniphan to the Federal Senate over Benton or D. R. Atchinson, the Missouri legislature adjourned on February 11, leaving Missouri with only one Senator from March, 1855, to March, 1857. The party never recovered, though slow to die, and with the holding of its last official meeting in Jefferson City in November, 1855, dissolution of the state organization was complete.

Florida was not normally a Whig state. Though she supported Taylor in 1848 the "opposition" was in control of both houses of the state legislature. In 1852 Pierce polled almost twice the number of votes given Scott. In the race for governor in 1854 the Whigs, though unsuccessful in putting their state ticket and their congressional aspirant into office, did manage to hold the Democrats to a thousand majority. The legislature was composed of twenty-five Whigs and thirty-four Democrats. The Whigs in a vigorous campaign had appealed to the strong Unionist group, had praised their own past record and their fight for state internal improvements, and had attempted to sow dissension among the Democrats.<sup>8</sup>

After the defeat of Scott in 1852 the cleavages between Northern and Southern Whiggery were increasingly apparent. In fact both parties in the South itself were disorganized and suffering because party lines had almost been obliterated in the fight for Southern nationalism or Southern sectionalism. The election of 1852 showed that the Whigs were not able to realign themselves

<sup>7</sup> St. Louis *Weekly News*, December 28, 1854; J. H. Ulbricht, "Frank P. Blair, Jr., and Missouri Politics, 1856-1860," unpublished master's thesis, University of Missouri, 1943, 8; Floyd Calvin Shoemaker, *Missouri and Missourians*, 5 vols. (Chicago, 1943), I, 632-33.

<sup>8</sup> *Whig Almanac*, 1855, 45; Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, November 11, 1854.

as a strong national party. Among the four states lost by Pierce were the two Southern states of Kentucky and Tennessee. The Democrats could also rejoice that the last Whig governor had fallen, and that there were thirty-one Democratic governors in thirty-one states.

Southern Whigs, generally the older members of the rank and file, were willing to coast along and hope for better developments. Younger voters tended to drift into Democratic ranks. Party leaders, more clearly able to perceive the inevitable course of events, were divided into two groups: one became Democratic; the other sought some means to maintain an opposition group. The passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill was an added spur necessitating action.

The Southern Whigs were in danger of degeneration into nothing more than a mere fragmentary opposition group. Whig leaders and party members alike did not desire to sit on the sidelines. They had the choice of joining the Democrats or looking for a new party. Between the two new political parties the Southerner had but one choice, to avoid the Republicans. The American Party could now step into the breach and make timely proffers of a new political home. The new party seemed the only solution. It was one that could be rallied around new battle cries and new issues, where old animosities would not bar common association.

Among those who had the greatest personal economic and professional interests in keeping party division and political issues alive were those editors of the Whig newspapers scattered in villages throughout the South. Hamlets with a population of only 200 or 300 often had two rival newspapers. Whig editors of the numerous small papers with a circulation of only a few hundred vitally needed a party flag to fly. Politics was bread and butter to these men and they naturally looked, as the *La Grange* (Georgia) *Reporter* phrased it, "anxiously forward for some development either from the *Know Nothings* or the *Know Somethings*." A Louisiana editor frankly told his readers that since the Whigs had been dead in his parish (Plaquemines) since 1851, he had to find another party or issue to support or he would sink.

Some of the Whig papers began to prepare the ground and sow

the seed for a new party. The *Augusta Weekly Chronicle and Sentinel*, one of the most influential papers in the South, and one which had the largest circulation of any Georgia paper, published a number of Know-Nothing propaganda articles. The *Southern Recorder*, marking time, pointed out that the "Republican" party of Georgia was not in a hopeless minority and refused to coalesce with the Democrats. The *Recorder* chided the Democrats for allowing rumors to cause them to strike right and left without knowing whether they were hitting friend or foe. The editor announced that as he did "Know Nothing" he would "Say Nothing," except to hint that it was best to keep as cool as possible. After acknowledging the impossibility of the Southern Whigs effectively co-operating with Northern Whigs, in an editorial entitled "The Last Link Broken," the editor gradually began to print more and more articles favorable to Know-Nothingism. News of their victories and principles became more frequent and soon merged into open advocacy. This was the typical course followed in the state by most of the Whig papers, and a few of those of the Democrats.<sup>9</sup>

As a general rule a similar pattern of gradual association with the American Party was followed by all Southern editors who favored them. At first no person, editor or individual, would acknowledge his membership; many who perhaps had not yet formally joined would write, "we hear," "we are told," or "it is rumored," that "the mysterious 'Sam' has been recently in our midst," or "Democratic organs are looking downhearted at the numerous accessions to 'Sam's' councils." Skits, discussions of the national Know-Nothing movement, and mock rituals began to appear more and more frequently.

In North Carolina the first semiofficial announcements of the American Party were made in the *Raleigh Register* and the *Raleigh Tri-Weekly Star*. These contained extracts from the national party organ at Washington, the *American Organ*. On the last day of May, 1854, the *Register* copied a discussion of Know-Nothingism from a New York paper, closing with these words:

<sup>9</sup> George V. Irons, "The Secession Movement in Georgia," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Duke University, 1936, 11; *Augusta Weekly Chronicle and Sentinel*, January 4, February 15, 1854; Milledgeville (Georgia) *Southern Recorder*, August 8, December 26, 1854, quoting the *La Grange Reporter*.



"We take that this is something like official information, although we 'don't know.'" The next month the *Raleigh Standard* as the leading Democratic spokesman made its first attack upon the American Party by criticizing the space given by the *Raleigh Star* to correspondence from Washington on Know-Nothingism. The *Standard* immediately identified Know-Nothingism with "Whiggery in disguise." The *Standard* soon declared that the *Register*, by its bitter attacks on foreigners and Catholics and by its assertions that these held the balance of political power because of alleged nefarious scheming, had definitely, though cautiously, committed itself as an advocate of the party.

In June, 1854, the Woodville (Mississippi) *Wilkinson Whig* concluded, "Deride, scoff, malign, and traduce, it will avail nothing. Ere many suns have sunk into the west the 'Know-Nothings' will be the great and powerful party in the land—the bodyguard of our liberties and rights." The next month the editor assigned New York as the birthplace of the new party and doubted not that it would soon spread to every village and "restrain the brawlers and rioters from corrupting and degrading the land." After declaring that he had no quarrel with honest, upright, and intelligent foreigners whose modesty restrained them from trying to lead in politics until they had remained for a few years under our flag, the editor wondered why such a party had not sprung into existence long before. He "for one, wished them Godspeed in their glorious work of redemption and right."

The *Natchez Courier* from a friendly "neutral" position favored the party by publishing short squibs and notices concerning its activities in other states and Mississippi. The *Hinds Gazette* did likewise. The *Pontotoc Examiner* and the *Aberdeen Democrat* also joined in the hue and cry over the naturalization laws. The *Vicksburg Whig* and other Whig papers rapidly "saw the light." At first they denied or were vague about their support. The *Canton Citizen* concluded an article on Know-Nothingism: "If anybody knows from what we have said whether or not we are a Know-Nothing, they know more than we know, as we know nothing about the Know-Nothings and could not, therefore, know whether we are a 'Know-Nothing' or not."

In Alabama, the *Mobile Advertiser* was one of the earlier ad-

vocates of the American cause. On May 28, 1854, it condemned the tendency of some Southern Democrats to exult over the defeat of Cláyton's amendment to the homestead bill on the grounds that if the bill passed nothing could prevent "the northern Free-soilers from forwarding the half dozen shiploads of emigrants to Kansas."

Some of the editors, Whig and Democratic alike, hesitated before committing themselves. The Cahaba (Alabama) *Dallas Gazette*, for example, gave space to rumors and discussion of the party nationally, but did not become abusive until some months had passed. After reprinting several of the current mock exposures, and even letters defending the Americans, the editor finally announced that though he had been silent for "prudential reasons" he was ready to protest against secret political societies and religious persecutions. This he did in a rather conciliatory tone, and his descriptions of American meetings remained somewhat friendly.<sup>10</sup>

Editors in Florida were slow in becoming outright advocates of the new party until the year 1855 brought increasing interest and activity. The first articles to appear were reprints from Northern papers. The Jacksonville *Florida Republican* copied an article from the *Massachusetts Olive Branch* to show the good results of Americanism and an article from the New York *Courier and Enquirer* praising the party's principles.

One of the first openly to advocate Americanism in the South was the Norfolk (Virginia) *Era*, writing in August, 1854: "We have taken our position on the American Platform and shall maintain it to the best of our ability, believing that native born citizens only, should be elevated to posts of honor and trust under our government."

American local successes in Virginia in the spring of 1855 brought additional support from Virginia newspapers. But "support" must not be understood to imply that they necessarily approved all the features of the party or were even outright members of the party. One of the peculiar features of the American Party in Virginia was the participation of thousands in the party's

<sup>10</sup> Cahaba (Alabama) *Dallas Gazette*, June 2, July 7, 28, September 15, 22, 1854.

activities who were not formally initiated. Even a number of the candidates, contrary to the original national ritual, were not members of the party.

Virginia Whig papers long debated in open press as well as in their private minds. Was their best course actively to support the Americans or should they merely remain friendly and attempt to rally the Whigs again? The Petersburg *Intelligencer* was a prominent advocate of the abandonment of the Whig name and of the calling of an "anti-Wise" convention. The *Roanoke*, a Whig paper, mistaking the trend of affairs in June of 1854, declared, "The Know Nothings is the name of the last birth from the spawn of Northern fanaticism and yankee jugglery." Later it "saw Sam" and became more friendly.

The leading Whig organ, the Richmond *Whig and Observer*, finally accepted the gage for the Americans in its issue of January 3, 1855, by advising the Whigs to abandon, for the time at least, their hopes of their own state convention. This paper with the Petersburg *Intelligencer* and the Fredericksburg *Herald* invoked "the gallant and glorious Whigs of the state to rally to its [the American Winchester State Convention's] support with indomitable zeal, and with the quickened spirit of the days of yore." W. C. Rives, a prominent Whig, wrote William M. Burwell on November 12, 1854, that though he felt the Know-Nothings were on too narrow a basis to build a party, they would do until a new party could be organized against the Seward Whigs and the Pierce Democrats.<sup>11</sup>

The avowedly out-and-out rabid Virginian exponent of the Americans was the Richmond *Penny Post*, published weekly, semiweekly, and daily. A lively sheet, it rapidly achieved a large circulation.

For a time it appeared as though these ranks would be swelled by one of the three leading opposition papers of Richmond. The *Examiner*, piqued by the nomination of Wise on December 6, 1854, stated that unless the spirit of the Democratic Party improved there was no more chance of its success than there was that certain of the members of the party would go to heaven. A week later the editor wrote: "Know Nothingism is partially right.

<sup>11</sup> Shanks, *Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847-1861*, 49.

American citizenship ought not to be made dirt cheap. The sovereignty of this Republic is in the people, and every vagabond adventurer escaping from the jails and packed off from the poor houses of Europe is not fit for sovereign citizenship in this country the moment his dirty and stinking carcass touches our shores." Secrecy and religious proscription he objected to.

By attempting to avoid old party issues and maintaining neutrality on slavery, the Americans were to make a powerful appeal with new issues. So timely was the appearance of the American Party that the mistake has often been made of accepting the contemporary charge that it was only "Whiggery in disguise." Such was true only in a limited sense, for it rested upon a broader base than a mere reshuffling of names and principles. Its initial appeal was to as many Democrats as to Whigs, but Democratic allegiance was not enduring when nativistic issues failed to carry the day, and the American Party was to drift against its will into the whirlpools of controversial sectionalism.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FORMATION, INITIAL SUCCESSES, AND GROWTH IN 1854

AS HAS been seen, between 1850 and 1854 the stage was being set for the entry of the American Party into Southern states. Maryland was the first of the Southern states in which an American council was formed, preceding other Southern states by a year, and in some instances by two years. L. F. Schmeckebier, who has written one of the most authoritative monographs upon the American Party, had the advantage of writing at a time (1899) when he could interview men who had been prominent members of the order. He states that the Recording Secretary of the National Council and two members who were present told him that the first council meeting was held in the fall of 1852. Mary St. Patrick McConville, another student of the Maryland Americans, cites an exposure pamphlet written by a seceding member of 1854 as stating that the first Maryland council was organized in Baltimore during the winter of 1851 by seven residents, three New Yorkers, and one New Orleanian. Anna E. Carroll states that the founding date was in May, 1853, as does T. R. Whitney, who adds that the first State Council met October 14, 1853.<sup>1</sup> The differences of opinion as to the date of the founding of the American Party in Maryland arise from the failure to distinguish between the "Maryland American Party" and the "National American Party," which was not regularly organized until 1854. Maryland's "American Party" was incorporated into the national movement.

<sup>1</sup> Schmeckebier, "History of the Know Nothing Party in Maryland," *loc. cit.*, 13-15; Anna Ella Carroll, *The Great American Battle* (New York, 1856), 270; Whitney, *Defense of the American Policy*, 284; McConville, *Political Nativism in the State of Maryland*, 64.

The Americans first showed their potential power in the state by intervening in the election in 1853 for state legislators from the Baltimore district. They did not nominate their candidates directly, but supported the nominees of the Temperance Party. Using the United Sons of America as a blind, the Americans had ascertained that the Temperance candidates were "safe" on the Kerney bill. Their support gave the victory to the Temperance Party. No attempt was made to influence the vote for governor. The ten representatives from the city held the balance of power in the state legislature between the Whigs and the Democrats. The Kerney bill, which was before the state legislature, was an attempt in the face of traditional American practice to divert public educational funds to the private use of church schools. In advocating the Kerney bill the Catholics stirred up a hornets' nest of hostile opinion. The bill, introduced in 1852, professed to make much-needed administrative reforms. It included provisions that the Catholic schools should be partially supported from public-school funds. During the discussion of the bill the matter of the use of the Bible as a "reading book" in the classroom was frequently discussed. Catholic children read the official Douay version in separate classrooms. The Catholic clergy objected to this nonsectarian treatment, as "to the Catholic the Bible is neither a schoolbook, a ritual, nor a popular treatise on theology." In fact, the Church had officially proclaimed at the Baltimore Provincial Council in 1840 that "moreover, we are disposed to doubt seriously whether the introduction of this sacred Volume as an ordinary classbook into schools is beneficial to religion."<sup>2</sup>

In the municipal election in Baltimore, October 11, 1854, the Americans astounded the Democrats not only by their strength, but by their political methods. The American Samuel Hinks was nominated by an unannounced secret meeting of the Americans only two weeks before the election. The Democrats, planning to control the balloting, marked the Democratic ballots by printing three blue stripes down the back. The Americans were warned and did likewise. The Democrats, well pleased at the number of "Democratic ballots" that were being cast, were amazed to learn that the Americans had carried the day. Hinks received a majority

<sup>2</sup> McConville, *Political Nativism in the State of Maryland*, 25, 39-41.

of more than 2,700, and the Americans gained control in the city council by 22 votes to 8. There were 24,949 votes cast. This was a heavier vote than that of 1852 and showed that the Democrats had lost nearly 7,000 votes.<sup>3</sup>

The second Southern state to organize councils was Louisiana, where the frauds in the fall elections of 1853 led to the organization of a reform party in the winter of 1854, which took the name of the American Party after the March election in New Orleans.<sup>4</sup> The time and place of the formation of the American Party in Louisiana has been shrouded in mystery. However, as early as January 3, 1854, an opposition paper, the *Alexandria Louisiana Democrat*, rejoiced in the victory of an "Anti-Know Nothing" ricket: "Thus it will be seen that here in Alexandria, the stronghold of Know Nothingism, it has been beaten."

The party was probably formed late in the fall of 1853 and the early months of 1854. By July, 1854, it had strong organizations in Iberville, West Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge, Franklin, St. Mary, St. Landry, Orleans, St. Bernard, and Plaquemines parishes. Newly organized councils existed in practically all the other sections of the state.

The reform forces in New Orleans organized in March, 1854, as an "Independent Party" and nominated candidates for all the city offices. Their members were made up of Whigs and Democrats, the Whigs predominating. It was undoubtedly a "Know-Nothing" trick as the Democratic papers averred.

The long-desired, newly passed registry law, which was intended to establish a certified list of eligible voters, was almost worthless, as noncompliance was no bar to voting. The Democrats organized the Irish into bands and marched them to the polls where hand-picked Irish Democratic inspectors and election officials permitted them to vote without question. These foreign-born election officials corruptly disregarded repeated plural votings over the protests of "Independent" challengers, and bloody clashes followed. The Irish, led by several policemen, got the

<sup>3</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, October 14, 1854; Schmeckebier, "History of the Know Nothing Party in Maryland," *loc. cit.*, 18-19.

<sup>4</sup> The Executive Committee of the American Party issued a statement nearly three years later asserting this, *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, September 7-14, 1857.

worst of the rioting, and several were killed. Fearing they had lost in spite of repeated frauds, the Democratic commissioners seized control of many of the ballot boxes and proceeded to count the votes. A mob gathered in front of the Seventh Ward poll where the "Independent" commissioner was excluded from the counting. When it was heard that an excess of over 750 votes more than had registered had been counted, the mob seized and destroyed the ballots. In the final count the "Independents" or Know-Nothings won control of all branches of the municipal government excepting the mayoralty and three recorderships (judgeships).<sup>5</sup> The election in the first district for three aldermen was reheld on May 8, with a victory for the "Independents."

A mass meeting held on April 19 adopted resolutions approving the reform movement and protesting against "dead men" voting. While not openly Know-Nothing, the assemblage was a public endorsement of the new party's course. By June its active members numbered several thousands in New Orleans who met in various halls throughout the city. No attempt was made to conceal the time and place of many of the meetings as was common in the Northern lodges, although attendance was forbidden to non-members.

Louisiana was not represented at the preliminary convention on May 14, 1854, nor at the first Grand Council of the National American Party in June. Like Mississippi, Louisiana maintained for a time an independent secret organization.

The close of the year found the Know-Nothings entrenched in New Orleans and growing in power over the state. A report from the Red River region showed that the "Know Nothings are flourishing in this vicinity and I fear that all of us will Know Nothing about the next election until the day is over." New councils were established in the Alexandria district. East Baton Rouge Parish fell into their control. East Feliciana and Franklin parishes filled vacancies in the lower house of the legislature with Know-Nothings. Donaldsonville, Thibodaux, and Houma had strong organizations, with the ladies forming an auxiliary organization, the "Know Everythings." The Democrats now "became sweet on

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, March 28, 29, 30, 1854; Baton Rouge *Weekly Comet*, March 24, April 2, 1854.



the old line Whigs," and attempted to gather them into their fold.<sup>6</sup>

The amount and variety of newspaper support indicates that organization of councils got under way very early in Mississippi, probably in April or May of 1854 at the very latest. The Reverend A. B. Longstreet, president of the University of Mississippi, in a widely publicized letter condemning Know-Nothingism, said he had learned of the organization of a council in his county in July of 1854. M. A. McKinnon, in a letter written from Oxford on April 26, 1855, to the Oxford *Flag* renouncing his membership, said that in July or August of the previous year a "Yankee piano peddling Whig" had introduced the order into Oxford. After being assured that no political or religious sentiments would be involved and that the secrecy was for the protection of members, he had joined and been elected president of the Council. He said instructions to members were to say "you 'Know Nothing'" when queried, and to be as evasive as possible. McKinnon, although he was writing at a time when he had quarreled with the order, admitted that some 1,200 members had been rapidly initiated in his county. Dr. A. W. Bartlett, a brother of E. B. Bartlett of Kentucky, one of the national presidents of the American Party, resided in Carroll County. It is natural to assume, since he took an active part in the party later, that he was "in the know" early, and used his influence to aid its inception.

There is evidence to indicate that the Mississippi party was at first not regularly affiliated with the National Council, though formed with its good wishes and Godspeed. The official name was probably the "Order of the Stars and Stripes." When Mississippi delegates attended the National Council in Philadelphia in June, 1855, there were difficulties and questions raised over their admittance. The delegates were finally accepted by a vote of three to one, but not until they had taken the Third, or Union, Degree.<sup>7</sup>

As early as May, 1854, regular meetings were being held in

<sup>6</sup> Alexandria (Louisiana) *Red River Republican*, December 2, 1854; Plaquemine (Louisiana) *Southern Sentinel*, November 4, 1854.

<sup>7</sup> Fort Adams (Mississippi) *Item*, June 26, 1855; Natchez *Daily Courier*, June 16, 1855; Carroll, *The Great American Battle*, 270; Whitney, *Defense of the American Policy*, 285, says that the party was formed in Mississippi in November, 1854.

Natchez. Members of the party were somewhat offended when the *Courier* gave a friendly farcical account of one of their secret meetings. The editor had described it as a Cuban filibustering expedition called by scattering paper at certain designated spots. Not only was filibustering a touchy political point, but the Americans were irked by too-accurate revelations of their "secret" methods in Natchez. By July, rumors of American strength were current and indications were given that their policies and principles would soon be known.

In April of 1854 the Americans made efforts to organize in Florida. Councils were first established in Hillsborough and Manatee counties. The Tallahassee *Floridian* and *Sentinel* pledged open allegiance to the new movement which had set up a council in Tallahassee in December, 1854.

Both Carroll and Whitney give the fall of 1854 as the date of the entrance of the American Party into Texas. The *Texas State Times*, a strong advocate of the party, in its issue of May 26, 1854, spoke of the activities of "Sam" and the "friends of that ubiquitous *hombre*" in Texas. The American Party in Texas had little opportunity during the first year of its existence to test its strength at the polls. Until the race for the legislature got well under way the party spent its time gaining new adherents and keeping those it had gained.

Georgia was the sixth Southern state to organize American councils. Georgia sent delegates to the national meeting which formulated the constitution and ritual of the party in June, 1854. The party's spread can be traced by the communications from local communities announcing rumors of establishment of lodges. Such communications were followed by attacks or defenses according to the political faith of the papers which published them.

I. W. Avery credits Judge F. H. Cone as being the founder of the party in Georgia. Carroll states that the Georgia councils were established before June, 1854. Whitney gives the month as May, 1854.<sup>8</sup> In October a "mysterious" victory was recorded at Griffin, when on the day of the election a surprise candidate announced for mayor against the Democratic and Whig candidates and de-

<sup>8</sup> I. W. Avery, *History of Georgia* (New York, 1887), 73; Carroll, *The Great American Battle*, 270; Whitney, *Defense of the American Policy*, 285.

feated both. Success in Milledgeville in December and victories in Dalton and Augusta followed in the early months of 1855.

The American Party entered Alabama early in 1854. The *Mobile Advertiser* stated that the order was introduced from Louisiana, but this probably was not true, as Louisiana herself was at first irregularly organized. The president of the American Party in August of 1855 mentioned that the party had been founded about a year previously. Whitney and Carroll date the establishment of the state council as July, 1854. Organization was effected rapidly, probably by June at the latest. A friend wrote C. C. Clay, Jr., on June 30, 1854, from Talladega: "I regret that this secret political society has found some favor in the South. Organizations exist, already, in many of our towns and will, in more."<sup>9</sup>

"It is with shame," wrote the worried *Florence Gazette*, "we announce that this infamous band of treasonable conspirators have organized in our midst; and now, like the midnight assassin or the highway robber, are endeavoring to accomplish their unhallowed purposes by stealth."

Alabama was one of the few Southern states represented at the first National Grand Council which was held in June, 1854.<sup>10</sup> By August the party was ready to show its hand. In the city and county elections at Mobile their ticket made a clear sweep, though marred by considerable fighting in which several Irishmen were severely beaten. This same month brought victory at Conta by a 300 majority.

In June there were 678 members in Mobile. By December these had increased to over 3,000. In the fall, rumors were frequent of the establishment of councils in various sections of the state. The Know-Nothings were elated by the election of C. R. Hansford as mayor of Montgomery by a vote of 339 to 134.

J. R. Robertson, in his "Sectionalism in Kentucky," says that the Whig Party had its strength in those sections of the state where there were rich soils, such as the bluegrass and the cavernous limestone regions.<sup>11</sup> To a large extent the Americans were to

<sup>9</sup> J. L. M. Curry to C. C. Clay, Jr., June 30, 1854, Clay Papers, Duke University.

<sup>10</sup> Cole, "Nativism in the Lower Mississippi Valley," *loc. cit.*, 272.

<sup>11</sup> J. R. Robertson, "Sectionalism in Kentucky from 1855 to 1865," in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, IV (June, 1917), 45-56. The excellent physical and political maps which accompany do not entirely confirm this statement.

show strength in the same quarters, gaining support in former Democratic counties.

The American Party was formed in the bluegrass state in August of 1854, according to Whitney. Carroll states that the party was organized before June, 1854, and that Kentucky sent delegates to the Grand Council meeting of June, 1854. As early as May 30, 1854, the Frankfort *Commonwealth* began its propaganda favorable to the Americans. In February of the following year the editor claimed he was not an American, although by that time he had become the most prominent editorial advocate of Americanism in the state.

By August the Americans had been organized a sufficient length of time to show their strength by electing an entire ticket at Louisville. In this month several other victories were reported from Pulaski, Kenton, Covington, Carroll, Jessamine, Logan, and Breckenridge counties. In Louisville on the last day of September the Americans used their stock mystifying trick of suddenly putting a candidate for mayor in the field on the day of the balloting, and successfully electing him.

But all was not rosy. In a special election for Congress A. J. Harbison was defeated despite advocacy of nativistic doctrines.

On November 2, 1854, it was rumored that the Know-Nothings were holding a secret meeting of the State Council. The following month the State Temperance Convention also assembled in Louisville, where they nominated G. W. Williams, a Whig, for governor, and a Democrat, James G. Hardy, for lieutenant governor. They hoped to have American Party backing but when the State Council met on February 21, 1855, only Hardy received American support.

The ninth Southern state to form an American organization was Virginia, where the appearance of this new party during the summer and fall of 1854 met with a great deal of encouragement. According to J. P. Hambleton, a contemporary Democratic "historian" who wrote an inaccurate and highly partisan account of the party in Virginia, it was founded at Charlottesville in July of 1854. Carroll states that the first lodge was established before the first of May, 1854.

The latter of these was probably the correct date as the Americans were well enough organized to win a municipal election in

the city of Norfolk in July. Here their candidate won by a majority of 262 out of 1,200 votes. By August, Norfolk had its own openly acknowledged organ, the *Era*, which announced, "We have taken our position on the American platform and shall maintain it to the best of our ability, believing that native born citizens only should be elevated to posts of honor and trust under our government."

A number of papers scattered over the state began to lay the groundwork for new councils (sometimes called lodges or wigwags by the uninitiated) by printing nativistic literature. Notable among these was the Richmond *Whig and Advertiser*, which on June 23, 1854, launched an attack on the foreigners in the Democratic ranks, especially those who were not naturalized, yet voted. The *Whig* said that the Democratic party had long held an unenviable record of petting and pampering these foreigners, most of whom were "insincere, corrupt, bigoted, and ignorant."

Hundreds of councils were formed. Nearly every village and hamlet of all sections of the state met and knew "Sam." Even the opponents of the organization admitted that the rapidity of its growth was more than amazing. When one realizes the difficulties of travel and communication at that time, it is remarkable how such a large percentage of the male population could be gathered into a secret order in such a short time.

The Americans, who perhaps had feared the Democratic statement that Virginia's *viva voce* system of voting would destroy and overcome the secrecy and pledges of their organization, were cheered by the election in Manchester, when "Sam suddenly appeared" and elected his candidate, 79 to 37. An interested spectator from a neighboring state observed: "A man may flatter himself with being able to strike down his bosom friend where the secret ballot exists; but this will not be so easy in the Old Dominion, where every voter must speak out his choice."<sup>12</sup>

Voting was not done by secret written ballot in Virginia in the 1850's. The election judges (magistrates) sat up on a bench with their clerks before them. When possible it was customary for the candidate to seat himself beside the judges. When the voter appeared, a judge called his name out loudly and asked him for whom he voted. His reply was duly enrolled and the candidate or his

<sup>12</sup> Raleigh *North Carolina Weekly Standard*, February 28, 1855.

representative arose, bowed, and thanked him, to the applause of his partisans.<sup>13</sup>

A few days after the Manchester election the Americans succeeded in filling the office of magistrate for the Third District in Henrico County. Twenty votes were discarded as fraudulent. The Americans claimed that wagonloads of Germans and Irish had been brought from Richmond to vote.

The presence of the Richmond foreign group aided the Americans. In April they elected the mayor, assessor, and collector of Richmond with a 1,342 majority out of 2,700 votes. Though the Democrats had nominated a full ticket and canvassed actively, they claimed that the election was not a party issue. They had hoped that the speech of Stephen A. Douglas in Richmond on March 27, just a week before the election, would frighten the American sympathizers. He had said that the Know-Nothings and Abolitionists in the North were one and the same thing. The accuracy of the pre-election predictions of the Americans and the foolish denials of the Democrats discredited and disheartened the Democrats.

The municipal election in Alexandria was held the same week as that of Richmond. The new party received 781 out of 1,019 votes. The Democrats lost more than three hundred of their regular supporters. Even though winning the municipal election in Fredericksburg, the new party again claimed that Irish workingmen engaged in erecting a new city water works were voted as Democrats even though they were not citizens. Other victories in Morgantown, Lynchburg, Portsmouth, Petersburg, and Wheeling showed that party strength was not confined to any one section of the state.<sup>14</sup>

Although the Democrats nominated Henry A. Wise as their candidate for governor in September, 1854, the Americans did not begin the campaign until the following year.

At the same time Virginia was being organized, the Americans were also active in Tennessee. Carroll and Whitney both say that the order was introduced into the state in October, 1854. M. B.

<sup>13</sup> J. S. Wise, *The End of an Era* (New York, 1902), 55-56.

<sup>14</sup> Richmond *Daily Enquirer*, August 18, 1855; Richmond *Daily Penny Post*, March 10-20, April 2, April 4-25, 1855.

Measmner says that the party got under way sometime between July 1, 1854, and May, 1855.<sup>15</sup> The earlier date is the more correct one. Elder J. R. Graves wrote in his *Tennessee Baptist*, August 26, 1854, under the heading "Know Nothing":

If we can read the "signs of the times" the Know Nothings are organizing in strength in this city, and the order will spread with great rapidity throughout the State, and without doubt will carry the next elections triumphantly over all parties.

Nothing is more evident than that our political parties have become sadly, deplorably corrupt. . . . Congress has become a most shameful and disgraceful scene of drunkenness, riot, and caucussing for the Presidency, and the minor offices of the government. The foreign element is increasing in fearful ratio. Nearly one million per annum of foreign Catholics, and German infidels—who, though opposed in all else, are agreed in the subversion of our free institutions—are pouring in upon us, and the tide is increasing. These foreigners have already commenced their warfare upon the use of the Bible in our public schools—against our free school system—against our Sabbath—against our laws. They boldly threaten to overthrow our constitution, through profligacy of our politicians; and we see our candidates for political preferment pandering more and more to the Catholic and foreign influence. We see from the last census that the majority of the civil and municipal offices of this government are today in the hands of Catholics and foreigners: an overwhelming majority of our army and navy are foreign Catholics. They hear the editors of Catholic papers, who are endorsed by their Archbishops, threatening in these words: "If Catholics ever gain an immense numerical majority, religious freedom in this country is at end." So say our enemies. So we believe.

Elder Graves then proceeded to list what he called the sixteen cardinal principles of the party, and predicted a great future for Americanism.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Murray Bryant Measmner, "History of the Know Nothing Party in Tennessee," unpublished master's thesis, University of Tennessee, 1931, 9.

<sup>16</sup> William G. Brownlow, *The Great Iron Wheel Examined, or Its False Spokes Extracted, and an Exhibition of Elder Graves, Its Builder* (Nashville, 1856), 288-89.

Elder Graves's article summarized a great deal of what was to be printed and reprinted by the American advocates during the next two years. Its tone and adjectives were mild, and its composition quite regular compared to the heat, scurrility, and peculiar modes of capitalization, punctuation, and emphasis often used by the newspapers of both sides. Parson William G. Brownlow, a man unrivaled in his day for mastery of this method of written warfare, soon entered the arena in favor of the Americans. He prayed that "the silent scourge would reach every town and hamlet until our country is saved from the infamy and demagogery of Democracy." After "proving" that Washington and Jackson were Know-Nothings, he continued, "We believe it to be the most powerful and effectually organized party in the known world." Then in bold-faced type, which he loved to use in varying sizes for emphasis, he wrote: "We are honest in our avowal when we say. . . . that the hand of God, as we sincerely believe, is visible in this thing."<sup>17</sup>

In Nashville the Americans proved their strength without openly showing their hand. Municipal election campaigns of the period were generally started by mass meetings and political activity continued for several weeks before election day. The Americans in 1854 apparently made no move until the morning of the election day when they placed their ticket and carried it at the polls. Friends could then announce, "from all circumstances it is shrewdly suspected and by many confidently believed that the election throughout is a victory of the Know Nothings." The successful candidate for mayor was known as a Democrat. The endorsement of certain Democratic candidates was a usual device to establish the American claims that the party was founded upon the "ruins of both the old parties."

The same general plan was followed in the "surprise victory" elections at the villages of Clarksville, Lawrenceburg, and London during the next few weeks. If both Whigs and Democrats had tickets in the field the Americans would choose a slate from these two lists and carry the combination into office.

In the North Carolina state election of 1854 the Democrats

<sup>17</sup> V. M. Queener, "William G. Brownlow as an Editor," in *East Tennessee Historical Society Publications*, IV (January, 1932), 79.



effectively stole the thunder which the Whigs had so long used. At the insistence of the rising and powerful editor, W. W. Holden, the Democratic candidate for governor, Thomas Bragg, late in the day took a stand in favor of internal improvements. The Democrats then advocated two popular stock programs of the Whigs, public education and internal improvements. On the question of calling a constitutional convention the Whigs failed to come out wholeheartedly in favor of a redistribution of seats in the lower house on a "white basis" as a substitute for a slave property or "black basis."<sup>18</sup>

This change of front by the Democrats to liberalism on state matters was to place the Americans at a marked disadvantage in the coming campaigns. During the year 1854 the preliminary plans and the initial organizations were formed. Although there were a number of councils in North Carolina in July, 1854, it is doubtful if these were far enough under way to influence the elections of that year. A report in 1855 that a council had been set up in Wake County in June, 1854, was substantiated by nativistic success in electing the High Sheriff two months later. The Democrats exhibited increased strength by carrying the state with a scant 2,000 votes out of 95,000. There were sixty-three Democrats and fifty-seven Whigs in the House of Commons and thirty Democrats to twenty Whigs in the upper chamber.<sup>19</sup>

The *Standard* in its issue of October 4, 1854, queried the Whigs about the rumor that they were intending to unite with the Know-Nothings in the coming Raleigh city election. In this contest the Americans were successful. That same month they succeeded in defeating two school committeemen who were opposed to Bible reading in the schools of Greenville. On October 12 the Americans of New Hanover announced their candidate for High Commissioner on the day of the balloting and were victorious in a nominally Democratic community. Early in January of the following year the towns of Wilmington and Fayetteville elected surprise candidates. Nativists continued to capture municipal slates in Kingston, Lilesville, Hillsboro, Edenton, Asheville, Wil-

<sup>18</sup> [W. W. Holden], *Memoirs of W. W. Holden*, 10; J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, *Party Politics in North Carolina, 1835-1860*, a James Sprunt Historical Publication (Durham, 1916), 168-71.

<sup>19</sup> *Whig Almanac*, 1855, 45.

mington, and other localities. They made much of these victories which the Democrats belittled.

In South Carolina the Democratic Party had a strangle hold upon the electorate. No opposition party existed. Among the Democrats there were the factions of Conservatives and Unionists and their rivals, the State Rights group. In this state no presidential elector or governor was selected by popular vote, as these were chosen by the legislature. While the moderates were successful in holding the extremists in check, and in affiliation with the "National Democrats," they were kept constantly on the defensive.

Whitney states that the American Party was organized in South Carolina on October 2, 1854, participating in the legislative election of the same month and successfully placing a senator from the Charleston district. In 1855, according to Laura A. White, some of the secessionists, convinced that they were losing control of the Democratic Party both in South Carolina and the nation, organized the new party in the state. The idea was to weaken "National Democracy."<sup>20</sup>

Missouri undoubtedly had American editorial advocates early in the year of 1854 who were hesitatingly estimating the part the new party was to play. Inconclusive evidence differs as to the date of state organization. Early in 1856 the *Columbia Missouri Statesman* accredited Thomas A. Harris, editor of the *Hannibal True American*, with introducing the order. The latter sheet on December 13, 1855, boasted that the Missouri Grand Council in its meeting in October, 1854, admitted young men who had reached their eighteenth birthday. Whitney dates the inception as of September, 1854.

As early as August 2 of that year the St. Louis *Missouri Cascade* announced that the victory "of an entire American ticket is owing [to] a *new order* which has sprung up here" as a "proper rebuke to the *Anzeiger* who boasts frequently that Germans hold the balance of political power and could elect any one whom they chose, and have urged Germans to organize and control St. Louis." A few days later the *Cascade* in referring to the Temperance men's

<sup>20</sup> Laura A. White, *Robert Barnwell Rhett: Father of Secession* (New York, 1931), 137; Whitney, *Defense of the American Policy*, 285.

lack of nomination for the next Federal Senator observed, "We shall know better after the election [of state legislators]; at present we *Know-Nothing*."

Good evidence of increasing activity of the Missouri Americans was evidenced by Democratic perturbation leading to condemnatory resolutions. A few newspapers such as the *St. Louis Weekly News* and the *Hannibal Whig Messenger* printed the usual short Know-Nothing skits, notices of successes in other states, and mild protests about foreign immigration without open editorial commitments. Not until William F. Switzler, editor of the *Columbia Missouri Statesman*, openly associated himself on March 7, 1856, did the former Whig press form a solid phalanx in support.

There is conflicting evidence as to the date of the inception of the American Party in Arkansas. Whitney simply dated it in the year 1854. Carroll, one contemporary source, does not mention Arkansas as organizing in 1854. Albert Pike, a national leader of the party and one of its Arkansas founders, stated in a speech in Baltimore that the party was "first heard of" in Arkansas in November, 1854. F. W. Allsopp, a biographer of Pike, quotes Pike as saying in 1853: ". . . even in Arkansas where no one imagined the order would gain a foothold, where political differences have been so bitter, party allegiance so staunch and true, and party prejudice so strong, even here in seven months we have seen our councils swell to more than six in number, and our members to between eight and ten thousand."<sup>21</sup>

Allsopp was probably in error and should have given the date of this quotation as 1855 rather than 1853. The "six" councils, too, must have been rather crowded, if he was accurately quoted. On June 27, 1854, the editor of the *Little Rock True Democrat* first took cognizance of the new Arkansas party. In the state election held in August there were no charges made by the Democrats that Americanism was a factor in the campaign. During the remainder of the year the *True Democrat* continued its attacks upon the American Party as a national movement. As no indication was given that there were American movements in the state, there are good grounds to assume that the party had not started function-

<sup>21</sup> Fred W. Allsopp, *Albert Pike: A Biography* (Little Rock, 1928), 118.

ing, for an opposition press was always eager to smell out political "mice." When the state legislature voted down a resolution condemning the American Party, and several weeks later elected a state auditor, American papers outside the state hailed these two incidents as party victories.

## CHAPTER SIX

### STATE ORGANIZATION AND SOUTHERN STRATEGY, 1855-1856

**T**HE NATIONAL ritual of the American Party, as has been seen, provided a set pattern for state organizations to which many Southern states conformed during the initiatory months and some, as in the case of Kentucky, until 1856. Others, such as Louisiana and Mississippi, began irregularly, later adopting the national ritual and organization, technically if not actually, in order to obtain a voice in the national party's actions. Leaders of the order realized early that the unique features of Know-Nothingism, as a secret political lodge, could not be capitalized upon beyond the very early and preliminary stages of party development. The lodge features, secrecy, initiation, and grips won adherents but deterred others because of vulnerability to criticism. Therefore, secrecy and ritual had to be abandoned gradually and customary party machinery adopted.

The Philadelphia platform of June 5, 1855, occasioned a number of ratification meetings, varying from small village councils to regularly called state councils and conventions.

One large ratification assemblage held in Baltimore in Monument Square had each ward march to the meeting to the music of their bands, carrying flags, banners, and transparencies. Speakers were present from several other states, including Kenneth Rayner of North Carolina, Jacob Broom of Pennsylvania, John Cunningham of South Carolina, Albert Pike of Arkansas, and A. R. Boteler of Virginia.

At a similar all-day rally at Raymond, Mississippi, July 28, 1855, under the motto "Liberty and Union," and marked with a "spirit of determination like the heroes of 76," some 2,500 gathered to hear General McNab Lindsay's "famous" brass band per-

form in the public square. The band, playing "Hail Columbia," circled the square in a carriage and headed for the barbecue grounds located at Alston's Spring. After two speeches the crowd assembled to the barbecue, "the largest ever in town." Then the band was recalled and the speaking resumed. Each address ran from two to three hours.

On November 27, 1855, a huge mass meeting was held in Louisville. Thousands attended, not only from all sections of the state, but from neighboring states. So large were the crowds, so numerous were the speakers, that several halls were required. E. B. Bartlett, F. W. Pucott of Massachusetts, Silas Stevens of Indiana, J. H. Beard of Ohio, Glendy Burke of Louisiana, S. Gant of Mississippi, John Williamson of Pennsylvania, and W. B. Brown of Illinois spoke.

Louisiana's course was watched with interest. On July 4, 1855, the State Council met in New Orleans to consider the proceedings of the National Council. It was thought before the meeting that an entirely independent course would be taken, but the committee on platform did not recommend a separation from the National Council. Nearly every parish in the state held mass meetings in which the Louisiana platform and its principles were endorsed. A convention of representatives from the northern parishes of Claiborne, Bossier, Bienville, and Winn met in Minden and attempted to reconcile the Louisiana platform and national platform by resolving that they were identical, differing only in "verbiage." New Orleans endorsed the state platform at a great assemblage of 10,000 people in Lafayette Square. Randell Hunt and Albert Pike spoke.

On December 1, 1855, the Florida American State Convention assembled at Tallahassee. Former Governor Thomas Brown presided. On December 5, R. K. Call and General Edward Hopkins, among others, discussed the Philadelphia Council meeting and the Philadelphia platform. Resolutions were passed endorsing the national platform with a number of reservations, principally expressions of state rights and the right to hold slaves in territories. R. K. Call, Edward Hopkins, and Lyman W. Rowley were selected as delegates to the next national council.

Not only did a number of these councils and conventions ratify

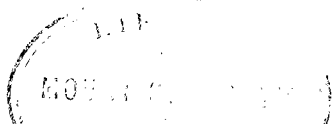
or comment on the platform, but they also requested, and in a few cases voted, to change the state constitutions and party machinery.

The State Council's *Address To the State of Missouri*, after cordially ratifying and endorsing the Philadelphia June platform, stated, ". . . in order to correct the malicious misrepresentation so industriously circulated. . . . [we re-declare] That it has ever been and still remains, a fundamental principle of the American Party, that . . . we most unequivocally condemn all and every species of interference, by any religious denomination, or church, that the civil relations either of governments or individuals and that the political actions of every man should be controlled by the dictates of his own judgment." The Missouri party ended all pretense of requiring any religious test for membership in 1855. Open meetings were occasionally held. The *Hannibal True American* in June, 1855, published in full the Third Degree as previously printed in the *Lynchburg Virginian*. A state convention meeting in St. Louis on April 17, 1856, officially abolished secrecy but not all ritualism.

The following month after the victory of Henry A. Wise, the Virginia Democratic gubernatorial candidate, the Richmond *Whig* made suggestions as to what course the Virginia party should follow in order to draw up its ranks for the contests to follow. Asserting that it was notorious that a large proportion of the best men in the state who had co-operated were not members of the party, it advised that these men be made eligible as delegates to the proposed state convention, and that all the ritual and objectionable features in organization be abandoned. Botts urged similar changes.

The two state councils refused to call a convention to discuss this matter but did call a state-wide "mass meeting" which met in Lynchburg on October 19 and passed resolutions favoring various nativistic policies and interpreting the eighth section of the Philadelphia platform. The meeting recommended to the national party that all secrecy be abolished and that reorganization be effected along traditional lines, with membership to all those who professed to owe no temporal allegiance to any foreign power.

The two state councils of Virginia met in Richmond on January 15, 1856, and passed resolutions which endorsed the entire



Philadelphia platform on June 12, 1855, against the objections of Botts to article twelve. Other resolutions abolished the ritual and the ceremonies, and permitted the subordinate councils to hold open meetings and invite all who were in favor of American principles to participate. The new organization was to have a president and a central state committee.<sup>1</sup>

In Tennessee the Americans were well organized. The failure of the Virginians against Wise proved an object lesson to renewed efforts. The State Executive Committee advised the formation of county councils to be composed of three delegates from each council in the county for the purpose of conferences and consultations on party strategy. In order to ascertain the exact numerical strength, semimonthly reports of members were required for the three months before the campaign. Literature was promised, produced, and distributed, it was asserted, to nearly three hundred councils averaging one hundred members.

In the fall of 1855 meetings throughout the state celebrated the nearness of Andrew Johnson's defeat and the "victory" in "controlling" the legislature. On October 8 at a state convention in Nashville, delegates were selected for the National Council. On February 12, 1856, another state convention was held in Nashville and a platform was issued which reaffirmed the national platform and recommended, though not officially doing so itself, that the National Council abandon all secrecy.<sup>2</sup>

During the first week of April, 1855, the Florida American State Convention met, officially announced its name as the American Party, and abandoned secrecy. In the following January there was a series of county ratification meetings endorsing the state platform and carrying out the recommendation of formation of precinct and corresponding committees. In April a general public call was issued for a meeting of the State Council, which assemblage at Tallahassee on June 2 nominated Davies S. Walker for governor and James M. Baker for Congress. R. K. Call presided and delivered a typical nativistic speech. The opening of the state

<sup>1</sup> Abingdon *Virginian*, February 9, 1856; Richmond *Whig and Public Advertiser*, July 12, 14, 1855.

<sup>2</sup> W. B. Campbell to David Campbell, August 20, 1855, Campbell Papers; W. M. Caskey, "The Second Administration of Governor Andrew Johnson," in East Tennessee Historical Society's *Publications*, II (1930), 42; Nashville *Daily Union and American*, February 15, 1856.



campaign occasioned numerous county meetings, which as a general rule formed, if they had not already done so, a Committee of Correspondence of five, and an Executive Vigilance Committee of five. In addition, they chose their nominees for the state senate and house of representatives.<sup>3</sup>

The loss of the Atlanta municipal election of January 16, 1855, because of allegedly illegal voting by one hundred Irish railway workers, caused the Georgia order to realize that they had capitalized as much as possible from the appeal of the ritual and mystery associated with the party's secretiveness. Leading members of the party began to urge an open declaration of principles and party machinery. A few men like Benjamin Hill refused to become members of the party as long as it maintained secrecy.

Responding to this pressure and to the inclination of most of its members, the State Council assembled in Macon on the ninth of May. The delegates issued a lengthy address explaining that while secrecy concerning the working machinery was needed first, the party's principles had always been known and were now proclaimed and scrutiny invited.<sup>4</sup>

Open campaigning was advised by the State Council which met at Milledgeville on December 20, 1855. On April 16 of the following year the State Council convened at Macon and passed a resolution abolishing all signs, grips, passwords, and ritual. As indicated above, secrecy had never been rigidly maintained by the Georgia party. As early as September of 1855 the councils of Newton County had resolved to abandon forthwith all secrecy and invited all supporters to associate with them. The Macon council refused to express itself officially on the Philadelphia nominations since, as it had dissolved itself as a state council, it preferred to call a state convention to do this. Public calls were issued for a convention to meet at Macon on July 8, inviting all who favored Fillmore to participate in the selection of delegates to this meeting. At the convention there were 296 delegates from 65 counties. Each county cast twice the votes that it had representatives. An electoral slate was named.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, April 7, June 7, July 5, 1855.

<sup>4</sup> Milledgeville (Georgia) *Southern Recorder*, July 10, 1855; Atlanta *Weekly Republican and Discipline*, April 25, 1855.

<sup>5</sup> Augusta *Daily Chronicle and Sentinel*, January 11-17, April 8, July 15, 1856.

Throughout the first years of Know-Nothingism the opposition attacked its secret ritual and organization directly and by innuendo. The Mississippi Democrats in their state convention at Jackson charged their opponents with inculcating and promoting insincerity and duplicity and stifling bold, open, and manly conversations which characterized men of honor.

The Grand Jury in Buncombe County, North Carolina, in the spring of 1855 presented the presiding judge with a statement that in their belief the Know-Nothings in the county were binding men by secret oaths and trying to control the free voting of citizens, and asked if they should bring an indictment. The judge ruled that if voters were unlawfully coerced they should act, but nothing was done.

The Americans were likened by Alabama critics to the Jacobins of France in their attempts "to manipulate voters by secret machinations of a few leaders." Their principles were "spurious, mis-begotten, and deformed." An Alabama Democratic county meeting resolved that all secret oath-bound political associations were anti-Republican, incompatible with the rightful privileges of the people and the free and liberal spirit of American institutions. A defense was entered by references to Democratic caucuses, both of legislative leaders and in party conventions. Speakers in many states made a point of welcoming the votes of members of "other" secret societies such as the Masons and Odd Fellows. Kenneth Rayner in his widely circulated defence pointed out that even Henry A. Wise, the order's arch foe, could not deny the right of freemen to meet and therefore the only objections could be on the grounds of taste.

Louisiana Americans regarded their ritual as disadvantageous and chafed at critics' fantastical allegations. Of course, the organization and ritual in Louisiana and the South in general were only semisecret after a few months, for Democrats obtained copies of the ritual and heard whispers from members whose consciences were not hurt by the breaking of oaths. Party members of the Louisiana legislature requested the removal of secrecy in March, 1856. The New Orleans *Crescent* especially longed to throw off covert methods, admitted the authenticity of the ritual of the Vermilion lodge which had fallen into Democratic hands, and challenged the New Orleans *Courier* to print the ritual. The

*Courier* absurdly refused to "further the cause of the Know Nothings by publishing their literature." The *Crescent* asserted that the real reason was that the Democrats knew that publication "would kill all their propaganda and lies" and announced that at the next meeting of the State Council it would seek permission to publish the ritual.

However, since the State Council which met April 8 resolved, "that all secrecy, obligations, signs, grips, and passwords of the Order shall now be abolished," the ritual was never officially publicized. The day the state convention met, June 16, 1856, the Council returned its power and authority to the constituent councils.

The convention was held in the hall of the house of representatives in Baton Rouge, with 273 delegates present. A series of resolutions cordially ratified the Philadelphia platform and endorsed the nomination of Fillmore and Andrew J. Donelson, provided for the appointment of a new state Executive Committee consisting of one member from each parish except Orleans, which was to have ten, and recommended the formation of new parish committees with subelectors whose duty it was to canvass each parish thoroughly and to make reports through the parish chairmen to the state executive body.<sup>6</sup>

While the disappointment over the election in North Carolina was still fresh, P. F. Pescue, president of the State Council, issued a secret call for an early meeting of the group to be held in Raleigh, October 19, 1855, so that a decision might be made whether to send delegates to a convention at Cincinnati, where certain Northern members wished to endorse the restoration of the Missouri Compromise. The Council refused to send delegates. Pescue named in his call several other important matters to be considered: first, the selection of the date and place of the next convention, in order to nominate a gubernatorial candidate; second, the appointment of ten delegates to the next National Council; third, the appointment of two delegates to the next National Nominating Convention; fourth, the framing of a platform for the campaign; and fifth, the consideration of the important matter of sustaining some paper as the state organ.

When a platform appeared it announced: "That, as the causes

<sup>6</sup> New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, March 22, April 10, 1856.

which rendered the secrecy of the organization necessary in its infancy, no longer exists [*sic*]<sup>7</sup>—all Secret ceremonials of the Order whether of initiation, obligations, signs, constitutions, rituals, or passwords be abolished—that we do constitute ourselves into a publicly organized party.”<sup>7</sup>

After the 1855 state election in Alabama there was a big mass meeting held by the Know-Nothings in Montgomery amidst an air of enthusiasm. The resolutions which were passed desired the removal of all vestiges of secrecy and the ritual so that they might force the Democrats to contest the coming election upon the party’s “true distinctive principles.” The following month the State Council assembled according to public call in the capital, and passed resolutions carrying these recommendations into full effect. Mississippi did likewise in January, 1856.

Three of the last Southern states to abandon secrecy and assume a traditional party organization were Tennessee, Kentucky, and Texas. Not until the national ritual was abolished did these states completely abandon secrecy. In Texas and Mississippi it had been customary to mask state council meetings by other assemblages such as the Brazos River Convention at Washington, Texas, or the state legislative meeting at Jackson, following a Masonic Convention at Vicksburg. Kentucky’s “Grand Council” re-formed the state organization in May of 1855, dividing the subordinate councils into “Decades” composed of the chiefs of not over ten “Clans.” Instructions and campaign documents could thus be passed down with direct responsibility for the checking and recognition of individual effort. The new Clan heads were requested to appoint committees to attend the polls and challenge illegal votes. Local candidates were advised that they could and should discuss publicly the principles of the order if the convention which nominated them so directed. Nominations for county and district were not to be made until ten days before the election date.<sup>8</sup>

During the years 1855 and 1856 there were a number of issues presented, a number of charges and allegations made that were common to all Southern Americans; some, such as slavery and

<sup>7</sup> Raleigh *Weekly Register*, October 31, 1855.

<sup>8</sup> Frankfort *Weekly Kentucky Yeoman*, January 30, February 23, March 20, July 10, 24, 1855; Frankfort *Commonwealth*, October 9, 1855.

religion, were of major importance. Others, such as "withdrawals," "secrecy," "Temperance," "Masonry," "Immigration and Nativism," and "Americanism as Whiggery in disguise," received considerable attention.

To the eye of old-line Democrats the latter charge was obviously true, though the new party claimed to have risen on the ruins of both the old parties. Only remnants of Whigs continued to function in the South. In Missouri, Alabama, Kentucky, and Maryland ineffectual efforts were made to keep the party alive. In the late spring of 1855 the Whigs of Kentucky were still trying to test the political mind. Those in Cumberland met and chose delegates for a state convention, and asked the *Somerset Gazette* and the *Frankfort Commonwealth* to publish their resolutions. The *Maysville Eagle* called upon them to rally. The *Mount Sterling Whig* appealed to old-line Whigs to support the Know-Nothings, promising that while there might be some features not pleasing, these would be neutralized in time, a recognition probably that secrecy and excessive statements would be modified when the party got its start. The *Lexington Observer and Reporter* warned that while they might wish to run candidates it would be useless as the issues must be American versus anti-American. The *Louisville Journal* advised that although feeling might say "yes" over the question of the expediency of calling a state Whig convention, wisdom said "no," for Douglas had brought up the Kansas-Nebraska Bill in order to keep party lines apart so as to aid his ambitions for the presidency. The *Journal* agreed that Whig principles were very fine, but predicted that such issues would play a very small part in the coming election. It advocated armed neutrality—not dissolution, but quiescence—as the best policy. The *Commonwealth* endorsed these views, vigorously pretending that the Whig Party was not dead. Therefore, no nominations were made.

For a time in 1855 the Whig organs of Alabama could not agree on a course of action. All opposed the Democratic candidates. Some were willing to fuse with the Americans. Others, such as the *Montgomery Alabama State Journal*, the *Macon Republican*, and the *Selma Reporter*, would have liked to call their own convention. On the question of state aid they also found them-

selves torn into two factions. The advisability of nominating a Whig, a Democrat, a state-aid man, or one opposed to state aid kept the remnants of the party so divided that no action was taken toward independent participation. Led by the *Montgomery Journal* and the *Huntsville Southern Advocate*, the Whigs, after the state elections, made tentative efforts toward reorganization, but the nomination of Fillmore quieted their voices until after his defeat.

In St. Mary's County, Maryland, two American nominees in the summer of 1855 refused to run, because they still considered themselves Whigs. The Whig Party in Somerset, Carroll, Queen Anne's, Talbot, Dorchester, Montgomery, Howard, Kent, and Worcester counties met, nominated complete local tickets, and selected delegates for a proposed state meeting to be held in Baltimore.<sup>9</sup>

Missouri Whiggery hesitated to abandon party organization, not necessarily because of loyalty to Whig principles, but rather to enable their leaders to re-orientate party strategy between Thomas Hart Benton, Francis P. Blair, Jr., and the "nullifiers." The *St. Louis Weekly News* protested that the St. Louis Whig Central Committee, led by John G. Priest, "the Jew"; John McNeil, a naturalized citizen; and George Knapp, "the Jesuit," were trying to dictate a policy for ward meetings condemning Know-Nothingism. The *News* advocated a Missouri Whig policy like that of Kentucky, asking "What can Whigs of St. Louis gain by fighting between the cross fires of the Democratic and American Party? Nothing. What can be gained by uniting with the Americans to defeat the Democrats? Everything."

Not until the early months of 1856 did the Missouri Whigs abandon separate organization and move to assume control of the new party in order to curb their common antagonists, the Democrats.<sup>10</sup>

Southern Democratic leaders could not agree as to the number of Whigs supporting the Americans. It is evident that there also were numerous Democrats who had changed their allegiance. Attempts were made to entice these back by honeyed words and

<sup>9</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, April 21, August 11, September 1, 1855.

<sup>10</sup> Walter H. Ryle, "Slavery and Party Realignment in Missouri in the State Election of 1856," in *Missouri Historical Review*, XXXIX (April, 1945), 324-27.

by drumming the cry of "Whig trick" in an obvious effort to prevent further depletions of their ranks.

Americans answered the charge of "Whiggery" by pointing out local and national Democrats who were elected by their support. Not only were the Democratic members exhibited as evidence, but those Whigs who were not associated were recalled to mind. Party papers published lists of, and quotations from, prominent Southern Democrats who were supporting the new political experiment. Virginia boasted that there were forty-seven former Democrats and fifty-three former Whigs present as delegates to their Winchester Convention. The composition of this convention and the number of Democratic nominees on American tickets were cited as a further denial that the party was "Whiggery in disguise."

When the *Texas State Gazette* printed a list of prominent Whigs in the United States who were opposing the Know-Nothings, their rival, the *Texas State Times*, flung their own argument back; how, if Whigs were voting against the party, could it be a Whig trick?

Publication of long lists of withdrawing members of the other party was a favorite campaign device, especially of the Democrats. Printed lists of as many as a hundred names would run in party organs several weeks at a time. Many letters were printed giving reasons for withdrawals ranging from the charge that as "Masons" or "Catholics" they could not tolerate "religious proscription," to the assertion that the party would not take a stand on the religious question and denounce "Jesuit influence" in government. Some mentioned slavery; others who had joined for the novelty wished to return to what they thought would be the winning side. Many withdrew when they, like Charles Gayarré of Louisiana, were disappointed in not receiving political preference. In one instance the president of the "Rough and Ready" Council in Anderson County, Kentucky, when denied a party nomination refused either to resign or to call another meeting, and the State Council had to remove him. William Haldeman, editor of the *Louisville Courier*, was a strong supporter of the party until he became angered by the nomination of Humphrey Marshall for Congress. He continued to oppose Marshall's candidacy and was "expelled" from the order.

In Galveston, Texas, Democrats reported that one Know-Nothing group had its own idea of a ritual and lost its charter when it refused to conform. The *Marshall Republican*, July 21, 1854, said numbers were withdrawing because the "rawhead and bloody bones" flag was too un-American.

The Americans as a rule denied that the numbers of seceders were many and pointed out that they could, if they desired, hail the accession of every Democrat as a "seceder." They demanded names and places and the "true facts." Later, numbers, while still believing in party principles, supported Buchanan from fear of Frémont, or lack of confidence in Fillmore's triumph.

Since many Masons were active in the American Party, the Masonic Order found it hard to maintain neutrality. The editor of the *Louisville American Free Mason* had to warn its readers that "fraternally speaking, there is no such thing as Free Masonry in this New Order." When a South Carolina Mason submitted an article which denounced the "Priest ridden Catholics as unfit for Masonic ties," and then wondered how many Masons could refuse to join the Know-Nothing Party which was checking the rapidly increasing foreign influence on the franchise, the editor warned that moderation was needed. Since cliques and caucuses were in all political parties, and since all party movements were secret (citing Tammany Hall), the editor counseled his fellow Masons that it was perfectly all right for Masons to affiliate with the new order if they were moderate.<sup>11</sup>

Except in Kentucky it is difficult to learn the part played in Know-Nothingism by Masons. Undoubtedly there was a large number of their members who found similar teachings in both orders. Albert Pike's prominent role in the two in Arkansas and nationally is another indication that this was true. There was, of course, no official endorsement, but Godspeed was no doubt often wished politically by Masons. In protest against this tendency an "Anti-Knownothing Mason" wrote a lengthy communication to the leading Democratic paper of Arkansas to assert that Masonry, its principles and its members, as well as anti-Masons, were opposed to Know-Nothingism. In Texas the consistency between Masonry and nativism was discussed.

<sup>11</sup> *Louisville American Free Mason*, September 6, 1854, February 15, August 15, 1855.



In only three states of the South did the Temperance movement become a factor to be dealt with by the two major parties, and then it became largely a personal issue with the candidates. Most Democratic papers found occasion to warn against fanatical reformers advocating the "isms" of "Temperance, Know Nothingism, Niggerism, Whiggery, Black Abolitionism, and Red Abolitionism" as common enemies of Democracy.

During the congressional campaign of 1855 in North Carolina much capital was made of the fact that the American candidate from the Fifth District, E. G. Reade, was thought to be the author of the "Pickled Rod Letters," which were a protest against the summary dismissal by the state legislature of a petition signed by more than 8,000 voters. This petition demanded a complete bone-dry prohibition law. The Democratic papers protested against the tendency of the Temperance Society to go into politics, but they endorsed a modified and controlled temperance which they asserted should not be a factor in local politics as it detracted from great national issues. However, when a state Temperance Convention composed of some 275 delegates from forty-six counties met the following year and gave endorsement to the Democratic candidates, they did not protest.

The North Carolina Americans as a party did not take sides on the temperance question. Rayner, to prove that he was no believer in the Maine law, occasionally poured himself a stiff toddy and drank it down before his audience. The *Goldsboro Telegraph*, said to be the only Whig paper in the state which did not support the Know-Nothings, renounced politics and adopted the Temperance Party.<sup>12</sup>

The Sons of Temperance were very strong in Georgia, especially among the Baptists. Joe E. Brown, a member, in his campaign for governor on the Democratic ticket, refused to treat with whisky, to the "old timers' dismay." On February 22, 1855, a small group of recalcitrant temperance men met in Atlanta and resolved to run a candidate for governor, later nominating B. H. Overby after resolving their movement was paramount to all political questions.

Both parties balked at committing themselves on the temper-

<sup>12</sup> Raleigh *Weekly Standard*, January 16-February 7, July 12, August 2, 1855; Hamilton, *Party Politics in North Carolina, 1835-1860*, 176-77.

ance issue and attempted to show that it should not be a party question but that local and individual candidates for the legislature could commit themselves. The American Party in Laurens County resolved that it appreciated Overby's motives but felt his race was a mere abstraction and a mistake. There was, of course, in all Southern states a special problem of temperance in controlling the illicit sale of liquor to Negroes, a traffic in which foreign-born small-store keepers often engaged. The Georgia Temperance Party issued an address just before the election condemning both parties for indifference toward this menace, reading in part: "We propose to turn the 2,200 *foreign* grog-shop keepers, in Georgia, out of office, and ask them to help us. They (the Know-Nothings) reply, 'We have no time for that now—we are trying to turn *foreigners* out of office;' and when we call upon the Democratic Party for aid, they excuse themselves, upon the ground that they have work enough to do in keeping these foreigners in office."<sup>13</sup>

Alabama Sons of Temperance, claiming 16,000 members, attempted to influence the 1855 state contest by endorsing only those candidates who were favorable to their cause. They had the support of four regular Democratic newssheets, but neither side profited more than the other from temperance support.

The influential temperance organ, the St. Louis *Missouri Cascade*, in adopting a new masthead in February, 1854, *The True Shepherd and Cascade*, carefully pointed out that the Know-Nothings had nothing to do with Temperance. A year later it became a "Weekly Journal Devoted to American Interests, Temperance and Literature," claiming a circulation of 10,000.

Know-Nothings in the South attempted to confine state canvasses to what were termed the "American issues": very mild and indirect anti-Catholicism, a strong anti-foreign stand, and a love of unionism which would protect state rights. Somewhat ineffectually, considerable attention was given to nativism. State platforms usually devoted two thirds of their planks to denunciations of the evils of foreign immigration of paupers, of hasty naturalization, and of the granting of the franchise without citizenship.

Affiliated newspapers argued, charged, and countercharged.

<sup>13</sup> Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 441.

They attempted to show the great need for an amendment of the naturalization laws by advancing the reasonableness of preventing paupers, criminals, and undesirables from entering and becoming citizens. They gave credence to exaggerated stories of monopolization by foreigners of offices in the government, particularly the State and Treasury departments. They protested against unnaturalized foreigners' votes being cast in Texas elections, where the party in order to spread their tenets among the Democrats paid for space in Democratic newspapers, an unusual practice. Know-Nothing editors asserted that the doctrine that "Americans should rule America" was not proscriptive and declared that no one who owed any kind of allegiance to a foreign power or ruler should have the right to vote. They cited page and volume of Jared Spark's edition of Washington's correspondence to prove his suspicions of foreign influence and foreign officers and to prove that the General had ordered in emergencies, "Put none but Americans on guard tonight."

The *Texas State Times* commented on the San Antonio *Zeitung* as being the only abolitionist paper published in the South and asked, "Why allow foreigners to criticize American institutions? The contiguity of the San Antonio River to the *Zeitung* office, we think [suggests] the suppression of that paper. Pitch in."

Party members in Texas viewed with suspicion the actions of the German annual singing convention and urged that this was only a mask to cover their well-known radical program and opposition to slavery. The Germans in masking it, they said, had departed from every rule of propriety and had gone astray after the teachings held up to them by traitors. Freethinkers, they warned, had no welcome in the United States.<sup>14</sup>

To illustrate the danger from German infidelity, Georgia Americans discussed resolutions of the Richmond Germans, whose "Red" Republicanism was only slightly less acceptable in the eyes of Southerners than "Black" Republicanism. Denunciations were made of the Socialists' publications and their outright participation in Southern politics in Texas and Kentucky. Fellow Mississippians called attention to dangers from the German por-

<sup>14</sup> Austin *Texas State Times*, May 19, 1854, January 20, August 4, 1855; San Antonio *Ledger*, August 1, 1855.

tion of foreign immigration. The *Michigan Volksblatt* was quoted to prove that German immigrants were antislavery, antitemperance, antinational, and antireligious. The San Antonio *Zeitung* was held up as a horrible example of German presumption and arrogance and as an example of growing German power establishing abolitionist and atheistic groups in the South. The Texas-German plans to remodel the Union were also an object of alarm.

A Democratic editor answered that any amount of foreignism, North or South, was better than "Abolitionism, Free Soilism, Whigism, Woman's Rightism, Socialism, Anti-Rentism, and one thousand other fretful spawns of the Know Nothings."

Missouri nativists protested against immigration and naturalization evils, still keeping an eye on the important block of German voters. The St. Louis *Intelligencer*, March 24, 1855, commenced a series of articles, which the St. Louis *Anzeiger* was asked to copy, urging naturalized Germans and those who planned to be naturalized to affiliate with the American Party against "old party traitors and factionists." The *Anzeiger* drily retorted, "No man with common sense expects a *German* paper to go for a Know-Nothing." However, before the new party collapsed, Germans were supporting them in large numbers, especially in St. Louis.

On January 15, 1855, William Russell Smith of Alabama delivered a long speech in the House of Representatives. Embellished and printed by the Washington *American Organ* in the summer, it was widely distributed in the other Southern states as well as in Alabama. This thoroughgoing nativistic document pictured the danger of great mass immigration of paupers and criminals congregating in the cities and expressed alarm over the American Revolutionary League and its meeting in Philadelphia in 1852. Smith reviewed the resolutions of the "German Society of Virginia," and indicated the danger of disciplined groups armed and trained to spread their un-American doctrines by propaganda and by force if necessary. Joseph Mazzini he quoted as writing that "twenty-four millions of emancipated Italians would be twenty-four millions of abolitionists to aid their brothers in America." The use of oaths he found sanctioned by a number of writers, historians, generally current practice, and legal decisions.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> W. R. Smith, *The American Party and Its Mission* (Washington, 1855), 1-5.

The Democrats were so anxious to deny everything their antagonists said that they would not admit that there was the slightest danger to the South from foreign immigrants. These, they said, were inherently friendly to the South and only settled in the Northwest because of the similarity of climate! One paper carried the slogan "Let's get more European Immigrants to settle in the South to help swell our numbers to defend slavery." Andrew Johnson explained that those foreigners who voted with the Democratic Party did so because they opposed all aristocracy. It was dangerous, he said, to have such a large group of inhabitants with no privileges for twenty-one years. He decried any mention of Catholic danger, either in the nation or in Tennessee.<sup>16</sup>

Alabama Know-Nothings absurdly claimed that the Mobile Democrats had obtained 5,000 "deceased" naturalization papers from New Orleans to issue to some 1,500 transient foreigners in Mobile. When rumors were noised about that the Germans had organized in Mobile, nativists became thoroughly aroused. They proclaimed that this "unholy alliance of Sag Nichts and the Democrats" would wreck the Sabbath and demoralize the state.

To Henry A. Wise's accusation that nativism was proscriptive, Kenneth Rayner in his widely circulated "letters" <sup>17</sup> pointed out that the Constitution provided that only native-born Americans were eligible for the presidency and the North Carolina constitution made a similar prerequisite for the governorship. Rayner believed that progressively increasing numbers of immigrants did not alone create a danger, but that the "banded organizations, the concentrated actions, and the clannish associations of foreigners" led to unrestrained licentiousness and political bartering of votes to any local or national party who cared to pander to them. He saw the immigrants as particularly powerful and dangerous in the Northwestern states where they held the balance of political power.

Sam Houston on November 23, 1855, stated:

Until recently a large portion of those who came to our shores were prompted by a desire to improve their condition. They were men of sobriety, men of enterprise, men of char-

<sup>16</sup> Nashville *Daily Union and American*, June 2, 1855.

<sup>17</sup> Raleigh *Tri-Weekly Star*, January 2-February 15, 1855; Raleigh *Weekly Register*, June 15, 1855.

acter, men of morals, and men of Intelligence. The crowned heads of Europe had formed no conspiracy against our institutions, or at least did not attempt its accomplishment. Of late they have determined to empty the convicts from their penitentiaries, and paupers from their poor houses. . . . [Immigration] is constantly diminishing Southern Representation in the Councils of our Nation, and increasing the proportionate ratio of the representation of North and Western states. This gives the abolitionists more power. It is greatly to the interests of the South to stop it and increase the naturalization period to twenty-one years.<sup>18</sup>

Albert Pike pleaded with his fellow citizens to align themselves with the only party that could remove the dangers of foreign voters in the various states of the Union. He cited statistics purporting to show that in fourteen major cities of the United States such as New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Orleans, Louisville, and St. Louis, the foreigners had 664,000 inhabitants to 1,000,000 for the natives and that these held the balance of power whenever two parties contested, and thus in effect were in a position to decide presidential choices and influence all American laws.

Tennesseans prefaced their typical state platform of May 7, 1855: "We believe that American Liberty is the richest inheritance ever committed to man, and, in proportion to its value, should be our vigilance and fidelity in its defense." The platform welcomed honest and industrious foreigners but protested against laws which allowed convicts and paupers to be dumped on the United States' shores. It regarded suffrage as a privilege reserved for those born or nurtured under native institutions sufficiently long to be thoroughly acquainted with the spirit of American institutions, but guaranteed the vested rights of citizens. One plank strongly endorsed the Union and the Constitution and stated that no higher law, whether of foreign prince or potentate, than the Constitution would be recognized. It also acknowledged the rights of all men to worship God freely and pledged no interference with such, though it expressed opposition to the "Union of Church and State."

<sup>18</sup> Copy of a speech delivered at Houston, June 9, 1855, Sam Houston Papers, University of Texas; speech at Austin, November 23, 1855, *ibid.*

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### LOCAL ISSUES, VICTORIES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES, 1855-1857

**R**ADICAL OR reactionary political programs advanced by those seeking power, as history has repeatedly shown, are frequently tempered when opportunity and responsibility for execution have been gained. Never entrusted with responsibility on a national scale, Know-Nothingism did achieve and exercise almost unchecked power in two Southern states, Kentucky and Maryland, and in several leading municipalities, such as New Orleans and Baltimore. The new party's record of legislative achievements was to be creditable although not outstanding, and it should be noted that very little of a nativistic nature was actually to be accomplished. Where in minority, Know-Nothingism could only denounce, expose, and attempt to make partisan capital from their opponents' actions while striving constantly toward unionism and a cessation of party bitterness.

One of the most important of all efforts of the Southern Americans was that made in Virginia in 1855. Rhodes marked the victory of the Democratic gubernatorial candidate, Henry A. Wise, as a decisive indication that no Southern state could be carried by the secret order. In a technical sense this was not so, nor in a real sense, for, though the loss to Wise was damaging, it was not disastrous.

Undoubtedly the Americans, by the use of poor political strategy, fumbled and mishandled an important test election that would have enhanced their strength throughout the South. The decision of Virginia party leaders not to nominate candidates until March 13 of the year 1855 gave the Democratic candidates

an immense advantage. The Americans failed to capitalize successfully upon the coolness which arose from the nomination of Henry A. Wise against the wishes of a strongly protesting section of his party. By skillful practice of political skulduggery, Wise had had the traditional two-thirds rule of the Democratic Party suspended, so that his bare majority would get him the nomination.<sup>1</sup>

Senator R. M. T. Hunter and other Democratic leaders seemingly were willing, after Wise got the nomination, to let him "take the bit in his teeth" and dash on to defeat as an easy way to remove him as a political power. Hunter was at odds with many of his party because he had recently introduced a bill similar in nature to the later Homestead Act. He considered establishing a rival Democratic paper in Richmond to counteract the *Enquirer* which was edited by one of Wise's sons, but decided that the American threat was too strong to risk dissension.<sup>2</sup>

The Norfolk Democratic Association wrote prominent Democratic candidates asking them to state their position on Know-Nothingism. Shelton F. Leake replied in a brief letter, but the more wily Wise replied at great length. Seizing upon the usual claptraps of political argument he levied them all upon the nativists. He found, no doubt, justifiable grounds of attack, but when such were not suited to his purpose he wandered off into fertile fields of conjecture, raised up bogeys, and then proceeded to slay them in fine style.

Being a man of energy and action, he immediately set out and stumped the state, with a goal of appearing in every county in Virginia. His fluency, his excellent command of satire, and his political conscience with elasticity enough to rise to all occasions enabled him to tear into the Know-Nothings with tooth and nail. Obtaining a copy of a purported Northern ritual he read from it at every speaking. Taking the "mummeries" of the ritual at their face value, he interpreted them to suit his own political advance-

<sup>1</sup> Constance Mary Gay, "The Campaign of 1855 in Virginia, and the Fall of the Know-Nothing Party," in *Richmond College Historical Papers*, I (1916), 321-26.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Mallory to R. M. T. Hunter, April 21, 1857, in C. H. Ambler (ed.), *Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter, 1826-1876*, American Historical Association *Annual Report*, 1916, 2 vols. (Washington, 1917), II, 208; Shanks, *Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847-1861*, 54.



ment, claiming that the party was evil, foul, and abolitionist in its inception and tendency.

More than six months elapsed before his opponent, Thomas S. Flournoy, took to the field to refute charges. In the meantime the entire state ticket remained as a sort of fixed target for Wise to shoot at without fear of reply. This, John Minor Botts believed, was insanity with such a man as Wise speaking to some 100,000 people, one half of whom never saw the American newspapers. Botts estimated that one fourth of the old Whigs voting for Wise could have elected Flournoy.

Flournoy, a lawyer, former member of Congress, an aristocrat by birth and association, was a man whose "popularity like Clay's was of a personal character. Men were Whigs because they loved Flournoy, and many rejoiced in his forensic success. He never had to spend a dollar for electioneering purposes. Houses were everywhere open to him, and his party friends were his zealous personal friends, and championed his cause with all their might and means."<sup>3</sup>

J. M. Patton of Richmond, running mate for attorney general, was a peculiar individual and a peculiar candidate for the Americans, regarding the office as one of too much dignity to mar by "campaign demagoguery." His previous record should not have recommended him to the party, for in 1848 he had described the nativistic movement as a "Hell-born and Hell-bound party." When he was finally prevailed upon to enter the canvass, he did so without much grace, defining his relationship to the order in a speech at the African Church in Richmond on April 3, 1855, saying: "Well, Gentlemen, as I have said before, I don't belong to this secret organization, I never belonged to any secret organization in my life, although most of my family were Masons. I have some sort of scruples and fastidiousness which prevented me at all times from going into any place to assume any secret engagement."<sup>4</sup>

Lewis E. Harvie privately acknowledged in a letter to R. M. T. Hunter:

<sup>3</sup> Wise, *The Life of Henry A. Wise*, 179-81. Wise stated that Flournoy was a friend of Abraham Lincoln. As a member of the Virginia Convention in 1861 he was a strong Unionist, though he was later a Confederate colonel.

<sup>4</sup> Richmond *Daily Penny Post*, April 10, 1855.

The ticket is strong and was the work of master workmen. It carries on its face, tho' too plainly the object for which it was made. Flournoy for the old line Whigs, Neals [Beale] for the Northwest and the old liners, and Patton for the Chivalry and to give weight. . . . We will beat them I have faith, if I had not I should well nigh despair, not only now but for the future. If we can stand up and maintain this fight and beat this movement in Virginia I feel that our institutions will be sound if not may God have mercy on us, for on him alone must be our reliance. I have as yet seen no flinching here, our men are true and hopeful. The Whigs are however either of the Organization or aiding it.<sup>5</sup>

Neither side pulled its punches. The *Penny Post* spoke of Wise as a ranting demagogue, an unprincipled renegade, a truculent bully whose manners and conversation denoted that he was a brawler, a foul-mouthed slanderer who unblushingly used the very scrapings and refuse of political style. Wise was accustomed to flay his opponents in a speech lasting three and one-half hours, in which repeatedly he drove home his exaggerated picture of Know-Nothingism. The contents of this speech were incorporated in a series of letters which were published by the Democratic press, South and North alike. Gradually the Democrats took the initiative and forced the American Party to assume the defensive. This was fatal. After the election Henry A. Wise wrote Senator George W. Jones of Iowa: "My policy from first to last was to strike so fast and thick at 'Sam' that he was kept on the defensive all the time. The man who defends his politics is half whipped. . . . The enemy was surprised that I never stopped to defend a position, but kept pressing constantly upon his center until it was broken. It was a desperate battle, Jones. As late as February we were beaten 20,000 votes. Nothing but Napoleonic tactics could save the field."<sup>6</sup>

Wise did not confine himself to Know-Nothingism but capitalized on the popularity in the west of internal improvements and the "white basis." Flournoy was only mildly behind internal im-

<sup>5</sup> Lewis E. Harvie to R. M. T. Hunter, March 17, 1855, in Ambler (ed.), *Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter, 1826-1875*, II, 162-63.

<sup>6</sup> Gay, "The Campaign of 1855 in Virginia, and the Fall of the Know-Nothing Party," *loc. cit.*, 333.

provements. As an easterner and as a conservative he was a strong "mixed basis" (mixed property and population basis voting) man. The eastern Americans accused Wise of selling his eastern principles for western votes.

The local victories achieved throughout Virginia early in 1855 were false harbingers of success for the fall election. Thomas S. Flournoy received 73,244 votes, Henry A. Wise, 83,424. The other state candidates got approximately the same number of votes. The Americans captured six seats in the senate and fifty-six in the house, to the Democrats' nineteen in the senate and ninety-six in the house. In the total number of votes, they had increased some 15,000 votes over what Scott had been able to draw in 1852, yet the Democrats had polled some 10,000 more at the same time. Only one Know-Nothing congressman was victorious, John S. Carlisle from the Eleventh District in the north-western part of the state.<sup>7</sup>

Though continuing to win municipal elections in larger towns such as Lynchburg and Richmond, the party lacked the numerical strength in the state legislature to be aggressive.

South Carolina for all practical purposes was a one-party state under the complete domination of the Democrats. A newly organized opposition such as the Americans had little to build upon. Colonel John Cunningham, editor of the *Charleston News*, attempted to foster Know-Nothingism by appealing to discontented Democrats under the guise of "purging" corruption from the state. The American state organization, comparatively insignificant as was its strength, roused the Democrats to counteraction. They railed against the union and the national affiliations of the new order, ignoring state issues. Francis Lieber, persuaded to lend his aid, wrote: "I . . . wish my fellow-immigrants to know that I am very far from knocking under. Knownothingism is a very wretched affair. It is, I suppose you know, child of Calvinistic bitterness,—at least here in the South. Protestantism is indolent. . . . They want to combat Papacy with hatred, not conquer it with love, truth, and the Gospel."<sup>8</sup>

Although South Carolina was completely in the hands of the

<sup>7</sup> *Whig Almanac*, 1856, 431. These returns, though differing somewhat from those published in contemporary Southern papers, are substantially correct.

<sup>8</sup> T. S. Perry, *The Life and Letters of Francis Lieber* (London, 1882), 278-79.

Democratic Party with the legislature choosing the presidential electors, the Americans continued their efforts in 1855 to achieve some local footing. In the late spring they elected the mayors of Greenville, Columbia, and also of Charleston.<sup>9</sup> Even with several Democratic papers endorsing Buchanan, there was not sufficient support for an opposition to operate in the state, and Know-Nothingism there passed out of existence.

With the exceptions of specific allegations of mismanagement of the State Railway, and the personal shifting of party leaders, there was little at issue in Georgia in 1855 and 1856 except national questions. Many Union Republicans, both Whig and Democrat, held back their formal allegiance to the Know-Nothings. As Alexander Stephens said, many "toted their own skilllets," only gradually aligning themselves. Both parties looked askance at the proposed Union Republican convention at Columbus in 1855, and it fell through. Garnett Andrews refused to accept the Know-Nothing nomination for governor until he had lost hope for the Union Republican movement. Among the Democrats there was quarreling and dissension over the rigid control exercised by Herschel V. Johnson and his friends. Colonel H. Mitchell, D. P. Ellis, N. G. Foster, A. H. Colquitt, and Representative James Johnson, who refused the Democratic nomination from the Second Congressional District, are examples of Democratic local leaders who swung into the American fold. Prominent Whigs who led in the new party were the Reverend Warren Aiken, Ambrose R. Wright, Benjamin Hill, former Senator John M. Berrien, F. S. Brown, Judge E. A. Nisbet (until the election of 1856), H. V. Miller, E. G. Cohannis, and Washington Poe. Alexander Stephens, Robert Toombs, Hiram Warner, and Charles McDonald declared themselves Democrats. To obtain former Whig support, the Democrats officially called themselves the "Democratic and Anti-Know Nothing Party."

The campaign was fought bitterly. H. L. Clay of Alabama, while visiting relatives of his wife at Macon, wrote his father: "There is much political Excitement throughout the State. Today

<sup>9</sup> Jacksonville *Florida Republican*, July 19, 1855. Previous to the Charleston election the Democratic Party leaders hurriedly arranged for the naturalization of 242 aliens in five days, Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 510.

# CUNNINGHAM

OF SOUTH CAROLINA, THE OLD KNOW  
NOTHING TORY.



## CUNNINGHAM!

FROM THE KOSCIUSKO (MISS.) *Southern Sun*, MARCH 24, 1855

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the Know Nothings hold a mass meeting in Macon. Yesterday delegations from adjoining counties came in in wagons, with banners in their ranks & colors flying from wagon beds & horses heads. I hear drums & fifes upon the street & see the marshals arraying at different points the several delegations to the meeting." <sup>10</sup>

Herschel Johnson himself believed at the start of the campaign that the American Party "had enrolled in its numerous and ubiquitous lodges a majority of the twelve thousand voters of Georgia without distinction of party." It was a contest, he continued, "at once fierce, bitter and hazardous to my success. It necessitated, on my part, a laborious canvass. I took the field and stumped almost the entire State. I exposed without mincing words, the nefarious principles and policy and aims of 'Know Nothingism.' I showed its hostility to the great ideas of our American institutions—how it sought to fetter freedom of speech, the press—and the right of religious toleration. In a word, that it was the most dangerous and the most wicked political organization that had ever existed in our country." <sup>11</sup>

Dr. Richard D. Arnold, writing from the Democratic stronghold of Savannah, viewed the election from a different angle: "We have had a light campaign . . . everything hinged on the preliminary municipal election. [This was won by the Democrats.] We worked hard and some of us bled freely. . . . Gov. Johnson is devilish lucky. He is a man of talent but he is personally very unpopular. *Cobb* saved him in his first election in 1853. . . . Ward could have had the nomination for Governor last year and would have beaten Andrews more." <sup>12</sup>

Previous to the 1855 congressional and state elections of Georgia, Americans in the legislature accused the Democrats of mismanagement of the state railroads by favoring Democrats, especially those newly converted, with special rate rebates. The following year a partisan legislative investigation whitewashed the administration, concealing a scandal which was only fully

<sup>10</sup> H. L. Clay to C. C. Clay, Sr., September 19, 1855, Clay Papers.

<sup>11</sup> P. S. Flippin, *Herschel V. Johnson of Georgia; States Rights Unionist* (Richmond, 1931), 69.

<sup>12</sup> H. R. Shyrock, "Letters of Richard D. Arnold, M.D., 1808-1876," in Trinity College Historical Society *Historical Papers*, XVIII-XXX (1929), 78-79.

revealed just before the outbreak of the Civil War, too late to be of benefit.

Final tallies gave Johnson, the Democratic candidate, victory by a vote of 53,478 to 43,222 for Garnett Andrews, and 6,284 for Overby, the Temperance candidate. The Americans placed sixty-one in the house of representatives and thirty-three in the senate, while Democratic numbers reached eighty-seven and seventy-three, respectively.

In the congressional races the Know-Nothings were successful in only two of the eight districts, the Third and the Seventh. The Second was lost by less than 600 votes out of nearly 15,000. In the Fourth, ordinarily a strong Democratic district, Benjamin Hill lost by only 70 votes out of nearly 14,000.

American strength was concentrated in about one third of the 112 counties comprising the rich cotton belt where the Whigs had formerly held sway, and also in those counties where the larger towns were located, Decatur with Bainbridge, Muscogee with Columbus, Bibb with Macon, Richmond with Augusta, Baldwin with Milledgeville, Fulton with Atlanta, and Clark with Athens.<sup>13</sup>

Defeat was tempered by new victories in January of 1856 in Jefferson, Fulton, Lumpkin, Hancock, and Camela counties, as well as in Atlanta.

In all states of the South, particularly North Carolina, both parties followed the course of events in Virginia. The guiding hand behind the new party in the Tarheel State was Kenneth Rayner, in all probability one of the originators of the national organization. Certainly he became, through his creation of the Third Degree, an avowed spokesman for Southerners, taking a prominent part in campaigns in Virginia and Pennsylvania as well as in North Carolina.

Rayner had a long record of participation in state politics. As a Whig, he had served from 1835 to 1839 in the state legislature and from 1846 to 1851 in Congress where he fiercely attacked the "higher law" theory and warned that the South could place no reliance on the executive power. Rayner was a prosperous planter, a Mason, and a rabid Protestant. He was contemporarily described

<sup>13</sup> B. H. Hill, *Senator Benjamin H. Hill of Georgia, His Life, Speeches and Writings* (Atlanta, 1893), 18; Milledgeville (Georgia) *Southern Recorder*, October 16, 1855.



as "open and frank in the expression of all his opinions upon political matters, fearless and bold . . . he may at times hazard too much of the expression of his opinions, but there lives not a man more pure in his native Americanism, more proud of his country and her institutions. He has all the elements of the first class orators. Rising with any subject he discusses, the intonations of his voice, the gestures, the vocabulary of words used to convey his ideas, all combine to rivet the attention of his auditors."<sup>14</sup>

Rayner, not excepting Bartlett, the National President, or Donelson, the vice-presidential candidate, was the most prominent Southerner in the national party organization. He was the "heavy gun" brought to bear upon Wise when Wise's campaign of vituperation in Virginia threatened to become a test case of the party's chances in the South. Wise's widely circulated letters on Know-Nothingism were answered with cold logic by Rayner. Unfortunately for his cause, logic, truth, and reason appealed to few. Though Rayner hewed close to these standards and was copied extensively by Southern editors, his letters in reply to Wise did not have the effect they seemed to merit. He was not verbose, nor did he appeal to passion or make extreme accusations. He analyzed Wise's arguments one by one. Wise, he said, generally started with truisms which no one would attempt to controvert, such as the "Sermon on the Mount," and the Magna Charta; then with good premises he made wholly unrelated conclusions that therefore secret organizations were bad.

One of the most prominent North Carolina Democrats to change allegiance was James B. Shepard, a congressional nominee. Other Democrats making the same choice were David Reid, O. L. Burch, Silas Burns, J. B. Babbitt, Dr. J. W. Tucker, W. Cantwell, R. C. Winthrop, J. Latham, John Stockard, and W. N. H. Smith, who shifted in 1857.

As there was no state campaign in 1855, the new party's chance to test its strength in other than county and municipal contests came in the fall elections for congressmen. They successfully

<sup>14</sup> Raleigh *Weekly Register*, January 17, 1855. Rayner voted in 1860 with the Democrats because of the ad valorem issue. During the war he fought on the Union side, and afterwards he moved to Mississippi. He was a judge on the court of commissioners on the Alabama Claims and served as Solicitor of the United States Treasury from 1877 to 1884. In 1866 he published a life of Andrew Johnson.

elected R. T. Paine in the First District, E. G. Reade in the Third and R. C. Puryear in the Sixth.

The gubernatorial campaign of the following year was given an initial impetus by American victories in Wilmington, Raleigh, and Fayetteville municipal elections. John A. Gilmer, American nominee for governor, was a distinguished lawyer who had served in the state senate. He was very popular and an excellent choice.

The questions upon which the people of the state were anxious to get the nominees to commit themselves, and upon which both parties managed never clearly and consistently to take a stand, were: free suffrage; more equitable representation of the western counties, always spoken of as the "white basis"; the method by which this should be secured; internal improvements; ad valorem taxation; and the distribution of Federal lands.

Gilmer's supporters approved of internal improvements "within the financial limitations of the state" and likewise side-stepped the political dynamite of the "white basis" and free-suffrage questions by "eschewing section issues in the State as well as in the Union, . . . [and declaring] their purpose of abiding by and maintaining the representative basis of the present constitution."

There had not been a sharp division of the parties along occupational lines, for, although many rich planters tended to be Democrats, prosperous businessmen had leaned to the Whigs. There was, however, a decided clash between the interests of the east and the west. The delegates of the western counties of both factions issued a pamphlet called the *Western Address*, advocating the right to amend the constitution of 1835. Senators were proportioned according to taxes paid, and ownership of fifty acres of land was a prerequisite for the senatorial vote. Representation in the House of Commons was allotted according to population as represented by poll taxes paid. Only white males between the ages of twenty-one and forty paid poll taxes, though the slaveowner paid poll taxes on three fifths of all his Negroes between twelve and fifty, male and female. Such an unfair system was about to result in the west's having only thirteen senators out of fifty, although it had a majority of the state's population.

By using slave poll taxes as a basis of representation, slave-own-

ing sections could retain political control. The east and the slave-owners of the middle section were determined not to allow the basis of representation to be changed or the slaves to be taxed as property. They refused to call a convention unless it be forbidden to discuss a change of representation.

Gilmer had signed the *Western Address* but believed that it had accomplished its purpose by obtaining from the east larger appropriations for internal improvements. His proposal to divide the school fund according to the white population met the strong opposition of Thomas Bragg, his Democratic opponent. Gilmer said that he believed in free suffrage, provided certain guarantees were made that lands, slaves, and white polls would be taxed fairly. Whenever possible he fell back on his platform and its equivocal statement. Bragg opposed equal taxation of slaves according to value, but claimed he was for free suffrage. Actually, since neither party was willing to commit itself, party spokesmen in each section contradicted each other.<sup>15</sup> Westerners and some of the poorer whites in the eastern section found their insistent demands for free suffrage turned aside.

Gilmer lost to Bragg by 44,991 to 57,555. A shift of 6 or 7 per cent of the ballots would have reversed the decision. The Democrats held 80 seats in the house and 33 in the senate to 40 and 17 for their opponents.

The central and more northern states of the ante-bellum South, with the exception perhaps of Virginia, received Americanism with a growing consciousness of their outlying position adjacent to free states rapidly filling with antislavery immigrants. In some senses the new party was more heartily received in these regions than in any other section of the South. Maryland, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri furnished one of the party's national presidents, E. B. Bartlett of Kentucky, and the vice-presidential candidate in 1856, Andrew Jackson Donelson of Tennessee. Maryland cast the only electoral vote for Fillmore, and in Maryland and Kentucky state governors were successfully placed in office. Maryland and Tennessee each had one of their Senators aligned with the party in the Thirty-fourth and Thirty-fifth Con-

<sup>15</sup> W. K. Boyd, *The Antecedents of the North Carolina Convention of 1836* (New York, 1910), 25; Raleigh *Weekly Register*, October 17, 1856; Raleigh *North Carolina Weekly Standard*, April 23, May 14, 21, 1856.

gresses. Both Senators from Kentucky were friendly to Americanism in the Thirty-fifth Congress, something not achieved by any other American group north or south. In the Thirty-fourth Congress Kentucky filled six of her ten congressional seats with Americans, Tennessee filled five of ten, and Missouri three of seven.

In Maryland, the first Southern state to be organized effectively, the party rested on its victories of 1854, and remained practically inactive until the meeting of the National Council in Philadelphia in June, 1855.

Candidates were not announced for some time after their nomination by the State Council in February, 1855. Uncertainty and the rumors that were soon afloat were expected to stimulate political interest.

In the summer, marked interest was not aroused until numerous ratification meetings over the state had opened up controversies on the significance of the order and on the stand of the Council on national politics.

The Baltimore mayoral campaign in the following year almost overshadowed the presidential contest. The Know-Nothings held a number of city-wide mass meetings in the various wards, in which speakers expounded on national and municipal issues.

Although the new party did get the bulk of the Whig voters, many of the old Whig leaders shifted to the Democrats. Among these were A. R. Sollers, who for a time as a Whig in the House of Representatives was favorable to Know-Nothingism, and T. F. Bowie, a brother-in-law of Reverdy Johnson; Bowie left the Americans and was sent to Congress by the Democrats in 1856 and 1858. Others were D. H. McPhail, Senator J. A. Pearce, Senator T. G. Pratt, and S. T. Wallis.

Scattered small pre-election victories spurred Maryland Know-Nothings in their successful efforts to capture, in the fall of 1855, the offices of comptroller and lottery commissioner, the only two state-wide vacancies. With a majority of nearly 3,000 out of some 80,000 votes cast they elected four of the six congressmen, J. B. Ricaud, J. Morrison Harris, Henry Winter Davis, and H. W. Hoffman. The First District was lost to an "independent Democrat," while the Sixth District was carried by a Whig.

The Sixth had three strong Whig counties, Charles, St. Marys, and Prince George, which were near the Virginia line, where there was a combination of Democrats, Whigs, and Catholics. The First and Sixth Districts had also been carried by Scott, a result which furnishes additional evidence that in Maryland at least the Whigs did not go over in a body to "Sam."

Victory gave the Americans a twenty-eight legislative majority on joint ballot because of fifty-four members in the house to one for the Whigs, nine for the Democrats, and ten for the Unionists, and because in the senate they numbered eight, the Whigs nine, the Democrats three, and the Unionists two. They captured the local offices in a majority of counties but in Baltimore, according to the *Baltimore Clipper*, because of overconfidence, they placed only eight councilmen to eleven for the Democrats and one for the independents. They still controlled the city, as on a joint ballot they had a majority of two.<sup>18</sup>

The critics of the American Party often predicted the dire results and radical legislation that would follow should they be allowed to apply their doctrines. In Maryland, where in 1855 they had gained control of the legislature, no steps or actions of an objectionable nature were taken. When the legislature convened on January 2, 1856, Democratic Governor T. W. Ligon sent a scorching message particularly censuring Maryland nativism as a cause of election riots.

A special committee of investigation was formed in the house with Anthony Kennedy as chairman. On January 22 Kennedy wrote the Governor for full information regarding "the secret dangerous society" which the Governor had reprobated, professing that the legislature had not the slightest notion where to seek for a party of that description. On the following day Ligon replied that he was sorry the house misunderstood as to which party he had referred. He suggested that the house call in witnesses, especially those reported to be delegates to the Cincinnati and Philadelphia conventions, and examine them under oaths. He also suggested that they obtain copies of the "Constitution of the National Council of the U. S. of America," adopted January 18, 1855; "The

<sup>18</sup> *Washington Weekly American Organ*, October 11, 1855, quoting the *Baltimore Clipper*; *Baltimore Sun*, October 13, November 17, December 17, 1855.

Constitution of the North Carolina State Council of January 18, 1855"; "The Resolves of the State Council of South Carolina at Charleston, August 14, 1855"; and "The Address of the State Council of Massachusetts."

The committee asked to be given the power to summon witnesses, and when this was denied, the majority refused to examine any witnesses, while the minority (Ligon's partisans) continued "investigations" privately. The majority report, sarcastic in tone, demonstrated that the Governor's alarm was hypocritical since the principles of the party had been widely published. They termed the message uncalled for, ill timed, and discourteous. The minority report merely consisted of an exposure of the "authentic" ritual, and the usual denunciations. Nothing was done with either report.

One of the most important actions taken was the election of Anthony Kennedy to the Senate. He was selected as the party candidate only after a spirited contest in caucus, where his opponents were J. D. Roman, who was soon to desert to the Democrats, S. O. Hoffman, S. M. Cochrane, Richard France, and Henry Winter Davis, also a later apostate.

Numerous petitions of a nativistic nature were filed desiring amendment of the naturalization laws in order to prevent paupers and criminals from entering the country. Petitions to remove tax exemptions on churches, petitions praying for "protection of persons confined in convents and asylums," were all lost by inaction. A "convent petition" was sponsored by A. B. Cross, a Presbyterian minister who had earlier written *Priests' Prisons for Women*. As editor of the *Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine*, he had for years been bitterly anti-Catholic, and had previously been prominent in the fight against the Kerney bill. Cross desired the passage of a law whereby every inmate of a convent would be brought into open court twice a year to make desired complaints. The American-dominated legislature decided that the writ of habeas corpus was sufficient protection.<sup>17</sup>

August 8, 1856, brought triumph again in Baltimore by 1,500

<sup>17</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, January 5, February 2, 1856; Schmeckebier, "History of the Know Nothing Party in Maryland," *loc. cit.*, 32-33; McConville, *Political Nativism in the State of Maryland*, 91-94.

votes, about 1,200 less than their majorities in the previous two years. To the city council they elected thirteen out of the eighteen members of the First Branch. The Democrats lost support in Baltimore because several of their members on the council had regularly refused to attend meetings in order to prevent a quorum. Returns were regarded as a preliminary indication of what Maryland would do in the presidential election.

The successes of Maryland were duplicated in Kentucky in 1855. The year began auspiciously when on January 6, victories were obtained in the former Whig city of Lexington, and in Democratic Covington.

Electioneering in Kentucky in 1855 and 1856 followed the customary party lines, enlivened by Democratic charges of rioting, and by countercharges of fraudulent naturalization and ballot-box stuffing. Judge J. Loring, who had originally been selected to head the American ticket, had withdrawn because of ill health and Charles S. Morehead did not receive the nomination until June. He was a man of fifty-three and was well known as a prosperous lawyer and planter, owning several plantations in the Lower South. In the past thirty years he had served as state attorney general and in the state and Federal legislatures. His position as a man of substance and standing was of material aid to his party.

Not all Whigs followed Morehead's example. Such prominent men as Arch Dixon, who was just finishing a term as a Whig Senator, former Lieutenant Governor H. G. Bibbs, J. R. Underwood, J. F. Bell, William Preston, T. F. Marshall, L. Anderson, T. B. Stevenson, C. F. Brummer, and A. C. Talbot, who was elected in 1854 by the Whigs to Congress, left their party and became Democrats. The last six had all been electors for Winfield Scott.

On April 5 "Sam's" followers carried their ticket at Elizabethtown, two days later repeating in Louisville by 1,400 votes, electing the mayor, city attorney, assessor, auditor, and treasurer. The Democrats placed one school trustee and two councilmen. There was a small amount of rioting which the Louisville *Courier* characterized as disgraceful, though it blamed neither party. In the Louisville election the American nominee for mayor, John Barbee, had no opposition, as the incumbent claimed that his term of

office did not expire until the next year. The circuit court of appeals sustained him, but the city officials recognized Barbee.

The Know-Nothing ticket won with a clean sweep in the state contest, electing Charles S. Morehead as governor, James G. Hardy as lieutenant governor, James Harlan as attorney general, Richard C. Wintersmith as treasurer, D. H. Haggard as president of the board of internal improvement, and the Reverend J. D. Matthews as superintendent of public instruction by a majority of 4,500 out of some 135,000 votes. Six of the Congressional districts were filled by Know-Nothings, J. P. Campbell from the Second District, W. L. Underwood from the Third, Humphrey Marshall from the Seventh, A. K. Marshall from the Eighth, L. M. Cox from the Ninth, and S. F. Swope from the Tenth. The American control of the legislature ensured the automatic return of John J. Crittenden to the Federal Senate.<sup>18</sup>

The Americans failed to carry a large part of the eastern, or mountainous, section of the state, the central hilly knob lands, and the western corner known as the "purchase." Failure in the mountains of the east was explained as largely due to neglect. They promised that "Sam will have visited and fully talked with the hardy mountaineers at their homes and fire sides" before the next election. However, during their existence as a political party they made no gains in this section, even in the old Whig counties.

For months after the balloting, Democrats in the legislature attempted to place the onus of the riots upon their opponents, who replied that it was the Democratic toughs who had repeatedly shot at and beaten peaceful citizens. Only on one issue did the two parties agree: for a three cents school tax which carried by a vote of 5 to 1.

In a special message and in his annual message to the Kentucky legislature in 1856 Governor Morehead strongly urged that there be no increase in banking facilities, as the state's currency was already overinflated. He successfully vetoed a few bills of this nature. Not much legislation of a partisan nature came up. The Americans submitted and passed a resolution, previously endorsed in party caucus, which condemned the Kansas-Nebraska Bill as a

<sup>18</sup> *Washington Weekly American Organ*, May 10, 1855; *Frankfort Commonwealth*, August 21, September 11, October 9, 1855.



cause of "irritation" to the public. The Democrats had been sustaining the Kansas-Nebraska Bill.<sup>19</sup>

The new legislature contained fifty-one Know-Nothings to thirty-four Democrats. The latter protested that their numbers had been reduced as a result of gerrymandering by the legislature which had met in 1855. A "true" or "fair" election, they claimed, would have given them fifty-five seats to forty-four. In the judicial districts which, according to the Democrats, were also gerrymandered, the Know-Nothings carried a majority of the offices. Other victories were reported in municipal elections of the state including Louisville and Henderson.

Although Tennesseans did not indulge in rioting, intimidation, and bloodshed during the press of political rivalry as did Kentuckians, almost equal heat was aroused. The clashing personalities of such men as Andrew Johnson and Parson Brownlow engendered a campaign filled with abuse, slander, coarseness, and violence of speech.

Leading and dominating the nativistic field was Parson Brownlow with his powerful paper. Brownlow was perhaps in some senses the most colorful person in the South. A young Methodist circuit rider from Virginia, he came to Tennessee, where he labored with pen and voice to defend Methodism and himself against any and all criticism. His true talents lay in editing a paper for a community in an age that appreciated his rough and ready style of journalism. He loved controversy, overstatement, and more controversy. To his family and friends he was a lovable character; to his enemies, a "hellhound." Why Brownlow joined the Americans is not uncertain: he had been a Whig; he hated the Catholic Church; he had long detested Johnson; and here was a good chance to fight. He poured forth the vials of feeling in his *Whig*, in the pulpit, and on the platform. Still unsatiated, he wrote books and pamphlets which defended his beliefs and belabored his critics.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Frankfort *Weekly Kentucky Yeoman*, January 25, 1856; Lewis Collins, *History of Kentucky* (Covington, 1874), 76; Louisville *Weekly Dollar Democrat*, September 22, 1856.

<sup>20</sup> E. M. Coulter, *William G. Brownlow, Fighting Parson of the Southern Highlands* (Chapel Hill, 1937), Chaps. I-VII; Oliver P. Temple, *Notable Men of Tennessee, Their Times and Their Contemporaries* (New York, 1912), 271-86; Queener, "William G. Brownlow As An Editor," *loc. cit.*, 76-81. Brownlow,

In December, 1854, just nine months before election day, Meredith P. Gentry announced his candidacy for the governorship by publishing a letter to his "Fellow Citizens." Gentry was not a new nor inconsequential figure in Tennessee politics. After four years in the state legislature he served in Congress from 1839 to 1853. Never officially nominated, he received full American Party support, though he would not acknowledge membership until secrecy was officially abandoned.

His opponent, Andrew Johnson, wrote a personal friend that the Know-Nothings had over 17,000 members, enough to win the day unless he made more than a vigorous campaign. This he had hoped not to do because he dreaded the rigors of a campaign in the heat of the summer.

The two candidates agreed on approximately sixty joint speaking appointments covering the majority of the state's counties. Johnson, first on the platform at Murfreesboro, reviewed Gentry's past career as one favoring the wealthy and a great national bank, proposing in Congress a high tariff on tea, coffee, and salt, and endeavoring to get the Federal government to assume the states' debts. Murfreesboro, thirty miles east of Nashville, was in his enemy's stronghold. Here the rich lands of Middle Tennessee had created a wealthy group of planters who were the personal friends of Gentry. Seizing upon the strategy which Henry A. Wise was so successfully using in Virginia, Johnson started a slashing attack. Crude, uncouth, and perhaps politically unscrupulous, he used the strongest invectives in portraying the evils of secret organizations with their grips and passwords. He flayed anti-Catholic doctrines as a war on, and a persecution of, religion. A choice portion of his stock speech which roiled his opponents, and especially Parson Brownlow, ran:

. . . the Devil, his satanic majesty the Prince of Darkness, who presides over the secret conclave held in Pandemonium, makes war upon all branches of Christ's Church. The Know Nothings advocate and defend none but make war upon all Churches and thus far Become the allies of the Prince of Darkness. . . . [They are] a denomination bound together

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*Americanism Contrasted*, the Knoxville *True Whig*, and Brownlow, *The Great Iron Wheel Examined*, contain excellent sources of Brownlow's style.

by secret and terrible oaths, the first of which, on the very initiation, fixes and requires them to carry a lie in their mouths!

Show me the dimensions of a Know Nothing, and I will show you a huge reptile, upon whose neck the foot of every honest man ought to be placed.

To Johnson his opponents were "like the Hyena, . . . come from their lair after midnight to prey upon Human Carcass. . . . [He] would as soon be found in the clan of John A. Murrell as in a Know Nothing Council."

Johnson finished speaking at Murfreesboro in an air of hostility from the crowd, who expected Gentry to arise and fling the lie to falsehoods and insinuations which Johnson had uttered. But Gentry disappointed his friends and lost votes by making a reply that was too lofty, dignified, and eloquent for the occasion. He should have shown to better advantage, as he had been characterized as the best speaker in Congress after the death of Clay.

Brownlow was appointed chairman of a committee to go to Gentry and tell him that East Tennessee was not accustomed to the use of gloved methods in political campaigns. Gentry answered:

I know what you mean gentlemen, you want me to commence by denouncing Johnson as a scoundrel, and growing stronger in denunciation until I reach the grand climax. Let me say that I think I know how to act as a gentleman and what rules of honorable debate among gentlemen require. I cannot degrade my manhood, even if my competitor does do so, no, not even to secure my election. If you wish me to get down to the level of my competitor, I beg you to hunt another to take my place, and let me retire at least with my own self respect and with unsullied honor.<sup>21</sup>

Gentry's motives were admirable, but the results were costly.

Johnson was charged with evading the issues and was raked over the coals for some of his individualistic ideas on government reform and his inherent dislike for slavery.

<sup>21</sup> Temple, *Notable Men of Tennessee*, 387-88. Temple, a warm friend of Gentry, accompanied him on the trip and later wrote a very impartial account of these events.

In the second joint debate Johnson introduced the "white basis" into the campaign, which was a proposal to divide the state into congressional districts strictly on the basis of the white population, without regard to the Federal three-fifths ratio—a maneuver to get western votes. Since in the cotton counties Johnson denied that he was for this change, he was branded as a liar and a shifter who was dangerously promoting abolitionism. In the western counties he was pictured as a demagogue talking just to get votes.

The Know-Nothings injected on their part only one issue applying specifically to Tennessee—more adequate provisions for education.

Amidst unparalleled bitterness on the part of the Democrats, the campaign came to a close with two great rallies in Nashville. The Americans, who held the first rally, exaggeratedly claimed 30,000 in attendance, with their opponents for once being slightly more modest in estimating attendance at their own closing rally.

The results of the heated contest between Andrew Johnson and Meredith P. Gentry held Tennesseans in suspense for some days, as the country districts were slow in sending in their results. In the eastern section Johnson was beaten by 21,774 to 19,394 votes. Here he received 1,000 votes less than in his last race. In the middle section he carried only eleven out of thirty-three counties, but received 32,623 votes to Gentry's 27,837. Gentry received some 1,200 more than had the last Whig candidate in that section. In the western section he won seven out of eighteen counties by 15,713 votes to 15,482. In this region there was also a gain over the previous election. The total for the state gave Gentry 65,332 and Johnson 67,499.

The new party had had difficulty in making an effective campaign in the eastern counties of the middle section because of their isolation and lack of communications, and here most of the Whigs voted with the Democrats. Their candidates in this section, instead of discussing party issues, had debated nothing else than the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. In this section, too, Gentry had lost votes because Johnson fooled many voters into believing that Gentry favored the "Maine law" for Tennessee. The nativists believed that they lost because of Catholic votes. Such a conclusion is

doubtful as most of the Catholics lived in the towns where nativism was strong and the middle counties where Johnson showed best were almost purely Protestant.

The Americans elected five of the ten congressmen, Emerson Etheridge, Charles Ready, Thomas Rivers, W. H. Sneed, and Felix Zollicoffer. In the senate, where former Governor Neil S. Brown, sponsored by Johnson, was chosen to preside, the Democrats had eleven members to fourteen for the Americans and Whigs. The lower house was nearly equally divided by the two parties.<sup>22</sup>

When the legislature convened Johnson scathingly denounced the Know-Nothings, who retaliated by refusing to confirm his nominations. They attempted to pass several partisan bills to deprive the Governor of his appointing power, but they were unable to carry legislation through the lower house.

Americanism in Missouri found itself in a political situation unique among the border states in that it had to cope with two groups of opponents, the regular Democrats and the followers of Thomas Hart Benton. In addition the old Whig leaders preserved some semblance of party alignment throughout 1855. Private correspondence, editorials, and individual contacts unofficially gave support to Americanism. The "know-nothing" pretense was assumed longer in Missouri than in any of her sister states.

As has been noted, the conversion of William F. Switzler's *Columbia Missouri Statesman* in 1856 marked the adherence of other Missouri news organs to make a total of twenty-six advocates out of the state's fifty-five newspapers. James S. Rollins, who was well qualified to know, privately estimated that the nativists had larger numbers of Whigs in their ranks than Democrats, although among the latter he found a number of strong leaders.

Those maneuvering behind the scenes were Francis P. Blair, Jr., James S. Rollins, George R. Smith, Samuel H. Woodson, J. O. Broadhead, and others. Blair, who privately regarded the Know-Nothings as an "expression of the deep seated dissatisfaction in both parties," hoped to get them to head their ticket with a "Benton Whig," presumably Rollins or Smith. Rollins wrote Smith, "I

<sup>22</sup> W. W. Gates to David Campbell, June 31, 1855, Campbell Papers; Nashville *Banner of Peace and Cumberland Presbyterian Advocate*, August 9, 1855, hereinafter cited as the Nashville *Banner of Peace*.

am glad Frank [Francis P. Blair, Jr.] and Gratz [B. Gratz Brown] will be satisfied with Americans, if thereby they can accomplish the overthrow of the nullifiers.”<sup>23</sup>

Relatively few important public posts were at issue during 1855 and Whig leaders were not yet ready to commit themselves openly. American propaganda was largely composed of speeches and notices of the party's activities outside of Missouri. Little that was locally constructive was advocated—only a running defense against Democratic charges of proscription and secrecy.

In the municipal race of April, 1855, the St. Louis *Sentinel* denounced the city's foreign policemen on Broadway for drunkenness and inability to perform their duties. With a refreshing absence of rowdyism at the polls, the Know-Nothings carried almost their entire ticket.

As American leaders felt that Rollins was too close to Francis P. Blair, Jr., and his abolitionist sympathies, they nominated Robert C. Ewing for the governorship over Rollins and Henry T. Blow. Actually, in one respect the Americans were not too strongly opposed to the anti-Bentonites, for this faction of Democracy was conservatively pro-Southern, discountenancing sectional agitation.

In the national, state, and in the St. Louis municipal elections of 1856 the Benton Democrats were caught between the Americans and anti-Benton Democrats. They adopted the stratagem of quietly promoting the fusion of both wings of Democracy in St. Louis against the Americans in order to weaken them in the state races. There the Bentonites hoped to trade support of American state candidates in return for Congressional support. After a brisk physical set-to in a city Democratic mass meeting a resolution proposing equal opposition to Know-Nothingism and Republicanism was dropped. The Americans remained the sole target.

St. Louis Know-Nothings pilloried F. P. Blair, Jr., as a Black Republican uttering contradictory ambiguous statements. The St. Louis *Weekly Intelligencer* made a bid April 8, 1856, to the “excellent and estimable” foreigners who had by residence in the United States “thrown off their foreign allegiance [and] adopted

<sup>23</sup> Ryle, “Slavery and Party Realignment in Missouri in the State Election of 1856,” *loc. cit.*, 327.

American sentiments and American customs." These "new American citizens in reality as well as in name" were called upon to aid in controlling the political power of a newer type of immigrant who, seeking the franchise, neglected to respect laws, learn English, or mix with American society.

During the campaign Benton denounced the antiforeign aspects of Ewing's platform and advocated cessation of slavery agitation. Ewing and his friends promised that their success would keep the Union safe and avoid a civil conflict. Trusten Polk represented and spoke for the pro-Southern Democratic wing.

Holding three Congressional seats, those of Luther M. Kennett in the First District, James J. Lindley in the Third, and Thomas P. Akers in the Fifth, as well as having three former Whigs, Gilchrist Porter, Mordecai Oliver, and Samuel Caruthers in Congress, the Missouri Americans optimistically hoped to retain their strength. When the returns were in, only two Know-Nothings, Thomas L. Anderson from the Second District, and Samuel H. Woodson in the Fifth were returned. These two Americans, four National Democrats, and Blair, a Benton Democrat, represented Missouri in the Thirty-fifth Congress.

In the three-cornered race between Trusten Polk, Robert C. Ewing, and Thomas Hart Benton for the governor's chair, Ewing received 40,578 votes or 35 per cent, while the winning Democrat Polk got 46,889 votes, or 40 per cent. Benton was last with 27,527, or 23 per cent. The Americans polled very few votes from the rabid proslavery sections of the state. In the legislature they were ineffective and were unable to aid their candidate for lieutenant governor, W. Newland, who lost a contested return by a margin of only 386 votes.<sup>24</sup>

The new party made less progress in Arkansas than in any other Southern state with the possible exception of South Carolina. In January of 1855 the Democrats introduced and passed a resolution in the state legislature asserting the unconstitutionality of any attempt to "proscribe any class of citizens or to exclude them from office . . . because of the place of birth or religious belief." The resolution denounced "a secret society meeting clandestinely" for political purposes, especially since it was "abolitionist in its con-

<sup>24</sup> Shoemaker, *Missouri and Missourians*, I, 637-40.

ception and management." Those in Arkansas who supported nativism were classified either as ignorant or as Southern traitors. Speakers and editors of the American Party professed high hopes and received some encouragement when, in a few weeks, American sympathizers rallied their strength and by a margin of 37 to 28 expunged the resolution from the official record.

James Yell, nominated for governor of Arkansas to run against Democrat E. N. Conway, was a former Democratic Congressman and by vigorous efforts added many new converts. He opposed the Kansas-Nebraska Bill; Conway endorsed it; both candidates endeavored to label the other as an aristocrat, a political crime in any state, but probably suicide in Arkansas. Yell was said to walk around in a silk velvet suit and wear ruffled shirts and an oiled wig.

The Pine Bluff *American* and the Little Rock *Gazette* accused Conway of projecting into the campaign the Real Estate Bank swindle that had rocked the state and lost between three and four millions of hard-earned Arkansas dollars. Yell claimed the credit for having originated the bank suit which uncovered the scandal and corruption. He favored a policy of paying off this state debt by special taxation if necessary, while Conway wished to liquidate the debt out of the assets of the defunct bank.<sup>25</sup>

One of the most bitter experiences that Arkansas Know-Nothingism suffered was the apostasy of Albert Pike, one of the most notable figures in all Arkansas history. A former Harvard student, fur trader, schoolteacher, and army captain, he was associated with Henry Winter Davis, another strong nativistic leader, in the practice of law in Washington until 1857. Early interested in the American Party, he wrote the Arkansas charter and by-laws and served as the first president of the State Council. A prominent Confederate, after the war he became one of the most noted Masons of America and is accredited with the authorship of much of the various advanced-degree rituals.

In 1856 he was selected as a delegate to the National Council and the National Nominating Convention, where he unsuccessfully fought a determined fight against the repeal of the twelfth section of the platform. When he found that a restatement was going to be effected, he left the Council and refused to sit, issuing

<sup>25</sup> Little Rock *True Democrat*, July 22, 1856.



with Charles Mathews of California a joint address "To the People of Arkansas and California." In this and three other pamphlets he defended his course on the grounds of Northern ascendancy.

Carrying off the spoils in the Little Rock city election in January of 1856 was the only test of nativism until the polls in the state election demonstrated that Know-Nothingism had little more strength than had Whiggery. James Yell's 15,422 votes were only half the number of his opponent, E. N. Conway.

The Gulf states approached Americanism with different motives, and perhaps with more individualist interpretations than did any other section of the South. Texas, as has been seen, had a foreign country as a neighbor, personalizing the antforeign feeling, while in Louisiana the chief supporters of the party were Catholic. In Louisiana and particularly in Mississippi the order was for some time not in conformity with the national ritual. Alabama and Florida were lukewarm in adherence to nativistic principles with local political issues predominating.

Throughout 1855 the presence of numbers of foreigners within the boundaries of the state gave Texas leaders a tangible point of attack. Cries of "abolitionism in Texas," "foreign voters," "tampering with the American Constitution" were increased in number when several mass meetings were held in the centers of German population, at Castroville in Medina County, and at San Antonio, with condemnatory resolutions printed in Spanish, German, and English. The *Galveston Zeitung*, August 19, 1855, contained a manifesto to the Germans of Texas advising them to form guard companies in all towns with enough population, in order to defend themselves.

When Sam Houston publicly announced his adherence to the new party, July 24, 1855, the *Texas State Times* and the *Austin Confederate* printed special editions, an unusual thing for such papers. Houston's place in Texas history both past and present made him an object of much discussion. He had long before been exposed to nativism as he lay on a bed, recovering from wounds received at San Jacinto, in the home of that fierce nativistic leader of the 1840's in New Orleans, William Christy. When Houston advocated the principles of the party he could do so quite honestly.

Another influential and vigorous Texan followed in Houston's step, J. S. Ford, Chairman of the Democratic State Committee and editor of the Austin *Texas State Times*, which had long been the state Democratic organ. Ford appealed for

a great national organization which will bind us with hooks of steel, the North and the South, and silence forever the dangerous and hateful dissensions hereto existing between these. . . . When our Union is threatened

"None but the Native proud and  
free born here,  
Can feel the throb or shed the  
patriot's tear."

In his memoirs he stated that his membership in the order was one "of those inconsiderate things men do sometimes." His support stemmed from endorsement of Unionism. He did not agree with the Catholic plank in the platform, and withdrew his support in the presidential election of 1856.

Other Democrats were confused as to what course to take. R. S. Neighbors wrote General Thomas J. Rusk: "I perceive that the elections are generally against the administration. The Know Nothing's organization appears to carry the day. . . . with what effect time will show. We of the old Democratic line do not like to give up our notions to what we don't understand *fully*. As you are our first leader please let me know how far you will confidently advise your friends to go." <sup>26</sup>

On June 11, 1855, a secret American convention nominated David C. Dickinson as governor with W. Jowers and Stephen F. Crosby as running mates. L. D. Evans was nominated over Judge T. P. Ochiltree for Congress from the Eastern District, and John Hancock for the Western.

Dickinson was chosen because he was in a position to make an issue of the "State plan for internal improvements." Edward M. Pease, the Democratic nominee, had endorsed this plan, which proposed that the state should build, own, and operate a system of railways. Dickinson in his speeches spent more time on the state railway and the Texas Debt Bill than on purely nativistic

<sup>26</sup> R. S. Neighbors to T. J. Rusk, December 18, 1855, Rusk Papers.

issues. The Texas Debt Bill provided for the payment of the debts of the old Republic from funds received from the sale of certain state lands. The *Texas State Times*, like Houston, insisted that this debt be paid with no scaling. The Democrats evaded local issues when possible.

Just before the election day Stephen F. Crosby, Know-Nothing candidate for commissioner of the general land office who had been prominent in the party even before his nomination, suddenly announced that he was no longer an American—too late for the Americans to take action. He received Democratic votes on account of this apostacy that the others of his ticket did not receive. The Democrats found they had won a sweeping victory over Dickinson. In the house of representatives there were sixty, and in the senate twenty, Democrats. The Americans seated thirty and nine, respectively. A few Know-Nothings obtained municipal and county offices in those sections where their party strength was concentrated.

During this second year of their existence, Texas Know-Nothings had been able to report minor scattered victories. In San Antonio three justices of the peace were elected; in Galveston their mayoral aspirant was installed; in Hays County a full ticket was successful; in Austin, Edward Peck was elevated to the mayor's seat.

The pettiness of some of the "triumphs" is illustrated by the following letter sent to Tennessee: "Away over on the western extreme of the State, on the Rio Grande, a few weeks since there was an election for a school teacher. The Catholics of the community boasted they were going to break down the Knownothing faction and put a man of their own faith to run for teacher. Things went on without any signs of opposition until the election day and when the vote was counted it was found out that a man who nobody knew was running was elected."<sup>27</sup>

When the state legislature was organized, the two groups did not caucus and no party feeling was evidenced in the selection of officers. During the session the Americans halfheartedly offered a nativistic resolution as their only partisan effort.

In Louisiana in 1855 and 1856 there were few except national

<sup>27</sup> Nashville *Banner of Peace*, March 22, 1855.

issues discussed even in state races. Christy's old nativistic associations prevented his receiving the governor's place on the party ticket, which fell to Charles Derbigny, a central Louisiana Catholic Creole, with a record of more than twenty years' service in the legislature. Louis Texada from the northern part of the state, and Randell Hunt of New Orleans completed the ticket. The latter, candidate for attorney general, had been almost forced to leave Charleston in 1833 for his Union stand in the legislature during the nullification crisis. In Louisiana he had soon become one of the leading lawyers of the state and was in great demand over the South for his oratorical ability. Clay had wished Fillmore to appoint him Attorney General of the United States, and later Lincoln considered him for a cabinet position. Hunt played an important part in the reconstruction history of Louisiana.<sup>28</sup>

Judah P. Benjamin delayed until August 3, 1855, before publicly breaking with his old Whig friends in their new alignment. He admitted that four fifths of his old party had been "seduced" into joining the new "Association" which he opposed because it was "antirepublican."

An innovation entered the election for city officials in New Orleans, when on March 17, 1856, an "Independent Ticket" was nominated for mayor, treasurer, and other municipal offices. The Know-Nothings opposed this, though many may have lent it their support believing it was nonpartisan and would give New Orleans a much-needed reform. There was little interest manifested before the election took place. The polls were kept open and no violence was permitted. The Democrats won only one office out of thirty-five, which made the local Know-Nothing papers rejoice that here was conclusive proof that a Catholic and slave community would support nativism.

The judicial elections of July and August also checked the exuberance of the Democrats, as they unexpectedly lost strength in the northern parishes. The confidence of the new order was further strengthened by victories in parish and municipal elections throughout the state. In Farmerville the entire municipal ticket was elected and Morehouse Parish in a special election

<sup>28</sup> W. H. Hunt, *Selected Arguments of Randell Hunt* (New Orleans, 1896), Preface.

chose a representative to the legislature. East Feliciana and St. Landry parish officials were elected as " 'Sam's' nearest and most intimate friends." Washington, Bayou Sara, Thibodaux, and Iberville installed Know-Nothing municipal governments, but that of Opelousas was about equally divided. P. H. Morgan, an American, was elected Judge of the Second District Court in August, by a vote of 2,789 to 986.

For a time after the state election, while the returns from the Red River District were yet to be heard from, the Americans thought they had carried the state ticket, but the final results showed a loss by a margin of about 3,000 votes, with the spoils of only one of Louisiana's four seats in Congress. George Eustis, Jr., was elected from the First District, which was comprised of Orleans, Plaquemines, and St. Bernard parishes. Miles Taylor defeated the veteran T. G. Hunt by 359 votes in the Second District. T. G. Davidson defeated Preston Pond by 115 votes in the Third District, and J. M. Sandidge carried the Fourth District over W. B. Lewis by about 2,300 votes. The last comprised the whole western section of the state and cast a majority of 2,747 against Derbigny in his race for the governor's chair. The returns indicated that only in this portion of the state did the Democrats have appreciably more strength.

In the lower house there were forty-seven Democrats and forty-one Know-Nothings, a division of strength soon changed, however, as the result of numerous contested election suits which were filed.

On the day of the balloting for the New Orleans municipal offices in March, 1856, both parties were responsible for rioting. The returns gave the Americans, for the first time, complete control of all branches of the city government. Only two places on the entire ticket—two assistant aldermen—fell to the Democrats. About 7,500 votes were cast with an American majority of 2,500. Success came in scattered municipal and parish elections throughout the state.

Early in the year 1855 all Mississippi Democratic organs were called to arms and warned of a stiff fight. Some anxiety was caused by the necessity of calming internal dissensions, Senator Stephen A. Adams as a particular case in hand. He had obtained his Sena-

torship from the Union legislature of 1852; now the State-Rights Democrats who were in the saddle were determined to "get his scalp." When Adams introduced a bill proposing to extend the period of naturalization, he was declared a traitor and read out of the party. Adams returned to the state in the spring of 1855 and made a number of speeches defending his course. He did not admit that he was a Know-Nothing, though for a time they welcomed him as a compatriot.<sup>29</sup>

The Democrats were also perturbed by Senator A. G. Brown's dalliance with the new party because of his jealousy of Jefferson Davis. In a private letter to J. F. H. Claiborne, March 29, 1855, on the premise that Know-Nothingism was in the ascendancy over the Democrats, he advised the use of less gall and wormwood and the application of more oil and honey as the safer plan in dealing with nativism. When forced by the exigencies of party politics to commit himself, he did so without the usual calling of names. He gradually became abusive of Americanism as its strength declined.<sup>30</sup>

Mississippi Democracy needed to be active for it was opposed by a strong state ticket headed by C. D. Fontaine. His announcement was the signal for the abandonment of complete secrecy and was followed by a wave of county and congressional meetings, many of which nominated entire slates of former Democrats. In some counties Democratic nominations went begging. Colin S. Tarpley, Chairman of the Democratic State Executive Committee, on November 15, 1855, wrote Stephen A. Douglas that at the campaign's opening all the Whigs and a large majority of Democrats were in the enemy's camp. Reuben Davis in his *Recollections* substantiates the great amount of Democratic defection.

Because Democratic John Quitman was such a strong opponent in the Fourth Congressional District, E. G. Goode refused to run and was supplanted by the very able editor of the *Courier*, Giles M. Hillyer, who was vigorous and effective.

<sup>29</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., Pt. 2, 944-49; Raymond (Mississippi) *Hinds County Gazette*, January 31, 1855.

<sup>30</sup> J. B. Ranck, *Albert Gallatin Brown, Radical Southern Nationalist* (New York, 1937), 135; Fort Adams (Mississippi) *Item*, June 2, 1855; Natchez *Daily Courier*, May 9, 10, 1855.

**W. S. BARRY & S. ADAMS.**



**THE POLITICAL FIGHT.**

**WAS S. BARRY, the Democratic Congressman, castigating and striking the powers of STEPHEN ADAMS the known leading U. S. Senator from Mississippi.**



**STEPHEN ADAMS**

FROM THE KOSCIUSKO (MISS.) *Southern Sun*, MARCH 17, 1855





The Americans' state ticket was strong. C. D. Fontaine had a long record as a State-Rights Democrat and had not favored payment of state bonds. W. A. Lake was a lawyer and successful planter. J. H. Taylor, who had served as a Pierce elector, was one of the ablest Democratic leaders, a member of the State Central Executive Committee, and editor of the Holly Springs *Empire Democrat* until he resigned upon accepting the nomination of the American Party. Both parties fought the canvass with all the means at their command. Quitman and Hillyer had twenty joint speaking engagements from September 15 through October 4. Travel, mostly by buggy, was hard work. Each candidate not only spoke an hour or two himself but also had to sit courteously and patiently on the platform and listen to other lengthy speeches.

There were relatively few important local issues at stake, both parties in substance differing only on men, the basic nativistic principles, and national alignments of their respective parties. The question of state payment of the Union and Planters Bank bonds bobbed up only occasionally in the campaign. Fontaine personally was opposed to payment, as his record showed, and the seventh resolution of the American State Platform specifically promised not to revive the question of payment. The Americans charged the Democrats with having nominated several "old Bond Paying Whigs" in order to catch a few votes.

The issues of the contest were strongly presented by both sides. John J. McRae and Fontaine made a joint tour of the state with the Congressional candidates. After the campaign Tarpley wrote Stephen A. Douglas that the Democrats had just passed through the severest contest in their party's history. He described the campaign as a fight to the death with more excitement than he had ever known and he prayed to God that he should never again experience such tension, for, while there were no riots, the speakers all went to the platforms armed. He told Douglas that the click of a dozen pistols being cocked during a speech was not unusual and that blood was on the verge of being spilled at a number of meetings.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Rowland, *Encyclopedia of Mississippi History*, I, 1003; P. L. Rainwater, *Mississippi, Storm Center of Secession, 1856-1861* (Baton Rouge, 1938), 33.

Since there were relatively few large towns in Mississippi, parties were not able to bolster morale, as in other Southern states, by demonstrating their strength in municipal elections, which ordinarily were nonpartisan. In 1855 the Know-Nothings of Vicksburg triumphed, 329 to 129 votes, but in Woodville succeeded in electing only a part of their ticket.

The state election of November 5 and 6 gave the Democrats the victory; in the gubernatorial contest McRae received 32,557 votes and C. D. Fontaine 27,670. W. A. Lake, who was elected from the Fourth District, which included largely the lower middle section of the state, was the only victorious American in the five Congressional districts. His was a slaveholding section, with a strong element of Union sentiment. A change of as few as 850 ballots would have given the Know-Nothings three congressional seats out of five. Political strength was divided almost identically as in the governor's race of 1853.<sup>32</sup>

Since the Democrats had control of the state executive and both branches of the legislature, their opponents were unable to do much more than concentrate on the coming presidential campaign.

At the Know-Nothing convention of June 12, 1855, which nominated the former Democrat George D. Shortridge for the governorship of Alabama, the more prominent delegates were J. K. Clinton, Patrick Henry, F. Swann, Isaac Davis, T. C. Billups, H. R. Miller, Giles M. Hillyer, D. Mitchell, L. H. Hones, Thomas S. Dabney, W. A. Purdom, A. R. Johnson, A. H. Arthur, William L. Sharkey, J. H. Taylor, F. M. Rayner, F. B. Cobb, and E. M. Yerger.

Former Democrats changing allegiance were Percy Walker, John M. Withers, J. E. Besler, S. F. Rice, William Russell Smith, Thomas R. Ward, General H. P. Watson, Edmund Harris, E. A. Bradford, W. B. Howard, V. T. Cleveland, R. L. Watkins, W. I. McBride, Charles Stone, Luke Pryor, T. B. Bethea, Reuben Chapman, J. T. Morgan, and Jeremiah Clemens. Clemens' adherence to the party was short, but he was enthusiastic during the year or more that he was a member. His letters of endorsement were

<sup>32</sup> Cole, *Whig Party in the South*, cf. maps in Appendix; Ranck, *Albert Gallatin Brown, Radical Southern Nationalist*, cf. maps pp. 79, 123; Vicksburg *Whig*, January 19, 1856.

widely printed in other states during the year of 1855. R. W. Walker, E. J. Bacon, and E. C. Pettigrew seemed to be the only prominent Whigs supporting the Democrats.

Shortridge, who advocated state aid in support of railroad companies, was chosen in order to appeal to those voters in the towns (Mobile, Selma, and Tuscaloosa) and in the counties along the proposed railroad routes. It is noticeable that the platform omitted mention of purely state issues, such as the controversial state-aid question, and did not stress the "Union and its preservation." As Governor John A. Winston, the Democratic candidate, was strongly supported by most of the old state-rights group, the moderates' votes fell to Shortridge. The Democrats did not issue a formal declaration of principles except those contained in county resolutions, a policy which temporarily alienated four of the twenty-five Democratic newspapers.

At Selma and at Tuscaloosa, and in many other counties in central and western Alabama, Shortridge proposed to lend the railroads one million dollars which the state treasury held as a surplus. The rates of interest and terms were to be fixed so that no extra taxes would be imposed. However, some of his supporting legislative candidates announced against state aid.

As a general rule the Americans nominated former Democrats in those districts of great Democratic strength, and former Whigs in the Whig districts, a stratagem which the Democrats declared to be a plot to control the senate in order to block the election of a Democratic United States Senator.

The campaign was vigorous, both of the gubernatorial candidates driving their buggies into nearly every section of the state. The various congressional candidates also worked energetically. At a meeting in Montgomery, July 24, some 8,000 heard Henry W. Hilliard and other speakers. In the Mobile district Percy Walker, who was in a strong position as a former Southern Rights Democrat and a firm advocate of state aid, made Americanism the chief issue of his campaign. In the old Montgomery district the American candidate, E. S. Shorter, attacked his opponent as a secessionist.

In the new Montgomery district neither Thomas H. Watts nor his party was very effective. In the Tuscaloosa district William

Russell Smith vigorously campaigned on nativistic lines. In the Florence district the Americans did not contest, and in the Huntsville district there was little party feeling. In the Talladega district the Know-Nothing nominee, S. W. Martin, denied being a member of the order, although he was careful not to offend its members.

The importance of state aid in the election is difficult to determine. Local candidates largely followed the prevalent sentiments of their districts. In the state race for governor, Winston's past record had already committed him to opposition. Shortridge tended to dodge the issue, and his friends in various sections had him both for and against state aid. The people of Mobile, where Know-Nothingism was strong, favored state aid because railroads into the interior would increase the commercial and industrial development of Mobile.

As much as possible Shortridge utilized the newspapers to carry campaign arguments but lacked sufficient supporters to reach all sections of the state; the campaign centered largely in the Mobile, Eufala, and Tuscaloosa districts.<sup>33</sup>

Although the Alabama Americans had felt encouraged by a series of municipal and probate judge victories in May in Mobile, Hitchcock, Pickens, and Tallapoosa, nevertheless when the final tallies of the governor's race were in they found defeat, in spite of casting the largest number of votes any opposition had ever polled. Shortridge received only 32,138 votes to Winston's 43,926. Two of the seven Congressmen were Know-Nothings, Percy Walker and William Russell Smith. Smith, as has been shown, was of dubious allegiance.

The state legislature was composed of sixty-one Democrats in the house and twenty-one in the senate; the Americans had thirty-eight in the house and twelve in the senate.

In the state legislature their minority could do little. The Democrats, in order to weaken their opponents still further, selected a former Whig, R. W. Walker, as speaker. A minority attempt to pass a bill to prevent the introduction of foreign paupers and

<sup>33</sup> *Montgomery Daily Mail*, June 25, 29, 1855; John Witherspoon DuBose, *Life and Times of William Lowndes Yancey* (Birmingham, 1892), 205-94; Lewy Dorman, *Party Politics in Alabama From 1850 Through 1860* (Wetumpka, 1935), 121-22.

criminals received scant attention. An endeavor to split the Democratic Party by fostering dissension among office seekers seemed feasible when the legislature turned to the election of a Federal Senator. Despite a schism in caucus the Democrats sent Benjamin Fitzpatrick to Washington. Luke Pryor, Know-Nothing member of the house of representatives, received all the support of his party.

In 1856 the "secret" order was again able to elect circuit judges, probate judges, tax assessors, and school superintendents in Talladega, Bibb, Shelby, and Mobile counties, and at Greensboro, Montgomery, Florence, and Selma. John M. Withers was named mayor of Mobile by a large majority. Withers, an able editor, left the party when Fillmore was nominated, resigned his office, and was re-elected.

Florida to a degree followed the pattern set by her sister Gulf states, Mississippi and Alabama. April, 1855, brought a "surprise victory" at Jacksonville, Florida, where "Sam" elected a candidate who did not know he was in the race. In May, Jacksonville and the surrounding county elected three out of the four American nominees for justices of the peace. In Tallahassee, and in Apalachicola, Alligator, Walton, Waxulla, Putnam, Leon, Madison, Gadsden, Marion, St. Johns, Hillsboro, Jefferson, Jackson, and Hernando counties similar victories were achieved in local elections.

As the year drew to a close, a nativistic bill was introduced in the state legislature to disfranchise certain foreign-born citizens in Florida. It passed the house but was killed in the senate. Party newspapers continued to criticize Governor James E. Broome and his use of volunteers in the current Indian wars.

Although the Americans were eager to regain control of the legislature in order to replace the "foreigner," Senator Stephen R. Mallory, they were doomed to disappointment. The scattering city and county victories of 1855 proved untrustworthy indications of popularity. The final vote gave D. S. Walker 5,894 votes to M. S. Perry's 6,214. While 161 votes would have reversed the defeat, the returns for the legislature were more indicative of relative strength. The senate stood seven Americans to thirteen Democrats and Anti-Know-Nothings and one vacancy. The

house was aligned twenty-nine to sixteen in favor of the Democratic Party.<sup>34</sup>

Know-Nothingism in Florida made its major efforts in the simultaneous state and national race in 1856. In the final month before balloting, the local issues involved chiefly personalities and the policy of sales of state lands, speculation, and speculation. Walker, the American candidate for governor, was one of the trustees for the state's Internal Improvement Fund, which had control of a large amount of state land that was being sold to settlers and speculators. Perry, the Democratic nominee, was also a trustee. Walker had voted against an increase in the sale price of the land, Perry for an increase. The Democrats charged that Walker was speculating in these lands. Walker's friends explained his vote as favoring the small buyer who wished to acquire lands and become an independent farmer. They in turn charged that Senator D. L. Yulee, a Democrat and a supporter of Perry, had endeavored to increase the price of these lands in order to remove them from competition with those of his own holdings which had been acquired by railroad grants.<sup>35</sup>

As the state campaign coincided with the national, campaign programs were frequent and long and often ran six or eight hours at a stretch. R. K. Call, former Democratic territorial governor, widely known in the surrounding states as a nativistic speaker, caused much distress to his former colleagues. The Americans entered the campaign with the issues of retrenchment and reform of state finances. As the campaign progressed, other minor state issues intruded.

The above indicates how the Southern states stood as they made ready for the supreme test—the return of Millard Fillmore to the presidency. Since the sources of national power necessarily spring from the strength and virility of the organizations within the states, strenuous efforts had been made to establish strong state and local councils. The stage was set to see how nativism and unionism would fare as they failed to divert the growing party sectionalism.

<sup>34</sup> Jacksonville *Florida Republican*, April 9, September 24, 1855; Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, November 15, 29, 1856. It perhaps would be more correct to say that "Democratic and Anti-Know-Nothing Party" was used.

<sup>35</sup> Jacksonville *Florida Republican*, August 6, September 24, October 1, 1856.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE CAMPAIGN OF 1856

**H**IGHLY ELATED by rapid growth and success in 1854,<sup>1</sup> the American Party's National Council at Cincinnati met ostensibly to revise the ritual and organization. The tremendous popularity of the new order was recognized by its leaders, who envisaged hopes of a national victory in 1856. Differing from their newly organized contemporaries, the Republicans, the Americans decided their only hope for success would come from a national basis and nonsectional appeal. This coincided with the original purpose and interpretation of the ritual, but additional emphasis on constitutional unity was thought advisable. Constitutional unity to the Southerners meant but one thing at this period—protection to slavery. It was increasingly evident from the fate of the Whigs that advocacy of proslaveryism in the North was not politically healthy. It was possible to stand more or less on the status quo and avoid too definite commitments. The moderates on both sides, particularly the South, were satisfied by the adoption of the Third or Union Degree, which was the product of the brain and pen of a former Southern conservative Whig, Kenneth Rayner, who played an active role in the inception, growth, and defense of the American Party nationally and regionally.

After a struggle with the antislavery delegates, Rayner conferred the degree upon all the members present. Within a few months, all regular members of the order also took this oath, solemnly swearing to do all in their power to make the Union a Union without end, to maintain it, to defend it, and to endeavor to procure amicable and equitable adjustments of political con-

<sup>1</sup> These victories, besides those previously noted in the Southern states, included marked success in New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts.

troversies. The oath also obligated the swearer to support Union men for public office and oppose those proposing disunity.

Acceptance of the Union Degree was made one of the prerequisites for admission to the next national meeting of the Council at Philadelphia on June 5, 1855. The delegates of Ohio and Mississippi were obliged to take the oath, after the latter group, irregularly organized as the Order of the Stars and Stripes, had gained admission to the national party.<sup>2</sup>

Action taken in regard to Louisiana's delegation at Philadelphia is not clear. Charles Gayarré, a Catholic, although making an impassioned defense of his own individualist Gallic interpretation of Roman Catholicism, was denied a seat.<sup>3</sup> His five Protestant companions were admitted on the fifth day.

It is apparent that the result of the contest in Virginia had not enhanced the power and influence of the Southern delegates at the National Council when it met in Philadelphia on June 5, 1855. A victory would have enabled them to dominate the meeting with a promise of a national victory through their support in the coming year. Southern delegates favored admittance of the Louisiana delegates without the Catholic test. Alabama, with an almost similar state platform, was admitted without any question, but Kenneth Rayner used his influence to prevent the partially Catholic delegation from Louisiana from being seated.<sup>4</sup>

There was a strong fight also against the Massachusetts delegates, waged by the Virginia delegate A. R. Boteler. The Southerners generally did not wish to see Henry Wilson admitted. Wilson was notorious for his rabid and successful advocacy of free-soilism; he was particularly obnoxious to Southern Americans because he had gained his Senate seat by abolitionist American support. He was committed to a policy of making the party abolitionist or destroying it. In order to placate the South, the

<sup>2</sup> Richmond *Daily Penny Post*, June 12, 1855.

<sup>3</sup> Alceé Fortier, *A History of Louisiana*, 4 vols. (New Orleans, 1903), III, 254-55; Charles Gayarré, *Address to the General Assembly of the Know Nothing Party held in Philadelphia in May, 1854* (n.d., n.p.), 1-4. This printed pamphlet with a handwritten title added is preserved at Howard-Tilden Memorial Library in New Orleans. There was no national convention held in Philadelphia in May of 1854. Other circumstances lead to the belief that the address was delivered in June, 1855.

<sup>4</sup> Richmond *Daily Penny Post*, June 12, 1855.



District of Columbia delegation was seated without a contest.<sup>5</sup> Confusion reigned briefly when it was reported that a Massachusetts delegate, in violation of the rules of secrecy, was giving accounts of the proceedings to the press. William Burwell of Virginia admitted that he had done likewise, but had meant no harm. Kenneth Rayner of North Carolina said he had been approached, but had refused. No action was taken, and the proceedings continued to be an open secret.

On the third day of the convention E. B. Bartlett of Kentucky was elected national president. James W. Barker of New York, who pictured himself as the founder of the party, did not wish to lose the presidency which he held; but in the interest of harmony he was replaced.<sup>6</sup> The Northerners felt this to be a Southern victory, and some protested that Southern delegates were monopolizing the floor. One of the most influential of the Southern speakers was Kenneth Rayner. He introduced the following resolution:

Whereas: The three great principles of the American Party are to secure to the native-born American people the control and management of their own government—to resist the aggressive policy and corrupting tendencies of the Roman Catholic church in our country—and to maintain and preserve the Union of these States;

We do therefore declare . . . that the question of slavery does not come within the preview of the objects of this organization. . . .

Henry Wilson fought the resolution and it failed to pass.<sup>7</sup>

On the ninth day William Alexander of Maryland, chairman of the Committee on Ritual, made a report suggesting no material alterations except specifically to allow "American" Catholics to enter. Most members readily conceded that individual Catholics they knew would make fine members of the American Party but professed to be uncertain as to how to draw a line in the ritual to handle the matter. John Minor Botts of Virginia had for some time

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, June 11, 1855; Scisco, "Political Nativism in New York State," *loc. cit.*, 144.

<sup>6</sup> *Richmond Daily Penny Post*, June 11, 1855.

<sup>7</sup> A. T. Burnley to John Crittenden, June 12, 1855, J. J. Crittenden Papers, Library of Congress; Raleigh *Weekly Register*, July 4, 1855.

strongly advocated the solicitation of Catholic members. After acrimonious discussions by Caleb Lyons of New York, J. S. Williams of Kentucky, Neil S. Brown of Tennessee, A. F. Hopkinson of Alabama, and John Cunningham of South Carolina, the resolution was defeated by a large majority.

Most attention centered on the platform committee, whose Southern members were A. F. Hopkinson, Albert Pike, Thomas Randall, F. H. Cone, J. S. Williams, J. B. Ricaud, A. H. Roby, R. R. Gamble, H. H. Haughton, John Cunningham, Neil S. Brown, J. L. McCall, and William M. Burwell.

While the committee was attempting in conference to iron out the irreconcilable differences of opinion over slavery, events within the convention were working toward a sharp cleavage of the delegates into two groups. J. S. Williams, a Kentucky delegate, presented a platform written by himself and two fellow Kentuckians, A. T. Burnley and George D. Prentice, which extended the Missouri Compromise line to the west coast with the exception of Kansas and Nebraska, these to be settled by squatter sovereignty. As a concession to the North the fugitive-slave law would be amended to permit jury trial in the state from which the accused slave had fled. The ultras of both sections blocked this move and the committee remained divided into Northern and Southern blocks.

On the seventh day, to help prevent a schism and to heal wounded feelings, the citizens of Philadelphia tendered the delegates a banquet dedicated to the "National Union." Schuyler Colfax from Indiana was scheduled to respond "to the press" but he refused to attend because it was a "Union-saving affair" with anti-slavery sentiments barred. A Virginia delegate, A. J. Crane, lauded the Union and said that every Southern man who said one good word for the North was called a "damn abolitionist" or was alleged to have been born in the North. He depreciated the effects of the election of Henry A. Wisc. Rayner, amidst great applause, responded to the toast "The Union" and launched into long and flowery praise of the need of union, the benefits of the old Union, and the glorious future of the Union.

When Rayner introduced his compromise resolution on slavery two days later he was not received with as much approbation. He

declared that slavery ought to be left to the control of those states where it existed, that the American Party was neither abolition nor proslavery and therefore the Council had nothing to do with the question of slavery. Only two other delegates from the South voted with Rayner on this losing motion.<sup>8</sup>

Two different resolutions were reported by the committee on platform, that of the majority of eighteen states, and that of the minority of fourteen states. The majority report was submitted by William M. Burwell and had the support of all the Southern states, plus New York, Delaware, California, and the District of Columbia. By counting the District as a "state" there were thirty-two states represented. The majority block represented 145 electoral votes, the minority 140. The majority report known as the twelfth section of the Philadelphia platform read as follows:

*Resolved:* That the American Party having arisen upon the ruins and in spite of opposition of the Whig and Democratic parties, cannot be held in any manner responsible for the obnoxious acts or violated pledges of either; that the systematic agitation of the slavery question by those parties has elevated sectional hostility into a positive element of political power, and brought our institutions into peril. It has therefore become the imperative duty of the American Party to interpose for the purpose of giving peace to the country and perpetuity to the Union. That as experience has shown it is impossible to reconcile opinions so extreme as those which separate the disputants, and as there can be no dishonor in submitting to the law the National Council has deemed it the best guarantee of common justice and of future peace to abide by and maintain the existing laws upon the subject of slavery as a final and conclusive settlement of that subject in spirit and in substance.

*Resolved:* That regarding it the highest duty to avow their opinions upon a subject so important in distinct and unequivocal terms, it is hereby declared as the sense of this National Council that Congress possesses no power under the Constitution to legislate upon the subject of slavery in the States, where it does or may exist, or to exclude any State from admission into the Union because her Constitution does or does not recognize the institution of slavery as a part of her

<sup>8</sup> Brand, "History of the Know Nothing Party in Indiana," *loc. cit.*, 190; Raleigh North Carolina Weekly Standard, June 20, 27, 1855.

social system; and expressly pretermittng any expressions of opinion upon the power of Congress to establish or prohibit Slavery in any territory, it is the sense of this National Council that Congress ought not to legislate upon the subject of Slavery within the Territories of the United States, and that any interference of Congress with Slavery as it exists in the District of Columbia would be a violation of the spirit and intention of the compact by which the State of Maryland ceded the District to the United States, and a breach of the National Faith.

The minority report regarded the repeal of the Missouri Compromise as "a violation of the plighted troth of the nation."

In the heated three-day debate that followed, Alabama's delegation presented the South's views. Stephen Clark Foster of Maine accused the New York delegates of misrepresenting the popular sentiment of the people of New York. A Massachusetts delegate warned that the party in his state would not stand on a slavery platform. Former President James W. Barker defended New York's policy as conservatism in opposition to the fanaticism of Massachusetts. New York's adhesion to the Southern cause can be partially explained on the grounds that New York had two presidential aspirants, Millard Fillmore and George Law, and desired Southern support for one of its nomination. Vespasian Ellis, editor of the *Washington American Organ*, denounced Law's candidacy and charged him with conducting an active pre-election campaign by purchasing papers in Albany, New Orleans, and Pittsburgh.<sup>9</sup>

The minority report was defeated 92 to 51. The majority resolution was then adopted by a vote of 80 to 59. Missouri, New York, Delaware, California, Minnesota, and the District of Columbia divided their support. The antislavery men refused to accept the decision and called a caucus which met the following morning, June 14. There were some delegates present from every Northern state except New York. As "nativists and anti-slavery-ists" the caucus demanded the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and Federal protection of the "free franchise" in the territories.

<sup>9</sup> Raleigh *North Carolina Weekly Standard*, June 20, 27, 1855; Richmond *Daily Penny Post*, June 15, 1855.

The Indiana delegates pointed out that the party in Indiana had not waited until the National Council met to form and avow their opinion on slavery. The Indianians wanted it understood that "the edicts of the National Council, however canonical they may be, will be powerless to change those opinions or to reverse the action of the people of Indiana." Many of the Northern delegates left the National Council meeting. Others participated in the completion of the platform with section twelve as the slavery plank.<sup>10</sup>

The twelfth section was a victory for the South, but one that seemed to leave a bitter tang. Many had hoped and urged an even stronger proslavery statement but took what came and defended the party. For example, the Richmond *Penny Post* had previously demanded a more "definite and less vague" Union Degree, repeal of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, and full enforcement of the fugitive-slave law. Yet when the *Post* published the platform, it said, with an attempt at good grace: "We publish the resolutions on the subject of slavery today. They suit us very well, in the main; but we would have preferred a distinct declaration that Congress had no power, according to the spirit of the Constitution, to prohibit or establish slavery in the territories."

Other Southerners openly opposed it. Vespasian Ellis for his opposition was removed as editor of the Washington *American Organ*. Botts, who had actively supported the party in Virginia, wrote a letter from Louisville, Kentucky, criticizing the twelfth section. He was widely quoted by the Democrats to the discomfiture of the Americans. Botts gave as his opinion: "If the South continues to persist in holding on to that platform (listen to me I entreat you, while I tell you) certain and inglorious defeat awaits us. No matter what you and I think, and no matter how urgent it

<sup>10</sup> Raleigh *North Carolina Weekly Standard*, June 20, 27, 1855; Brand, "History of the Know Nothing Party in Indiana," *loc. cit.*, 191-92, 196. Indicative of dissension in Northern ranks was the attempt of certain dissatisfied elements to form a rival "Know Something" organization which was soon to die out. It served in New York, for instance, as a transitory stage for entrance into the Republican Party, Scisco, "Political Nativism in New York State," *loc. cit.*, 149, 159; Washington *National Intelligencer*, June 9, 1855. In Illinois the Know Somethings made a special appeal to the foreign vote on the anti-Nebraska platform. They disappeared with the death of the Know-Nothings, A. C. Cole, *The Era of the Civil War 1848-1860* (Springfield, 1919), 139. This is one of the volumes of the Centennial History of Illinois.

may be, it is not satisfactory to the people in the Union.”<sup>11</sup> Time was to prove that the twelfth section was not able to stand, and the National Council the following year took action to change it.

By fall the Northern seceders had changed their attitude, had held a convention in Cincinnati, and had made overtures to rejoin the national party with delegates pledged to demand restoration of the Missouri Compromise.

A special session of the National Council was called by President Bartlett to meet in Philadelphia on February 18, 1856, four days before the regular session, in order to abolish secrecy and ceremonies so that presidential nominations could be made openly. The early meeting was called on the authority of requests made by five state councils.<sup>12</sup>

On the second day of the Council the admittance of Louisiana's delegates caused a stir. George Eustis, who had ably made a full and complete explanation of the attitude of the Louisiana party toward the eighth section and Catholicism in general just a month before in Congress, repeated some of these arguments. The Louisiana councils, state and subordinate, said Eustis, were simply and purely nativistic. While they repudiated the eighth section of the Philadelphia platform, they were true to the precepts of the American Party. None of their members recognized the temporal powers of the papacy and were thoroughly in accord with the cry “Native born Americans should rule America.”<sup>13</sup> Parson William G. Brownlow and Thomas A. R. Nelson of Tennessee, both ultra Protestants, favored the admission of the delegates. One of the Louisianians, a Presbyterian elder, read from the state's ritual to show that each member was required specifically to deny the temporal power of the Pope. By a vote of 67 to 50 they were admitted. Most of the Southern delegates voted affirmatively.

It was seemingly easy for such a Catholic-hater as Brownlow to justify to himself, if that was necessary on any question, his acceptance of the Louisiana Catholics on the basis of the Gallic influence prevalent there. He and certain other advocates could

<sup>11</sup> *Richmond Daily Enquirer*, December 18, 25, 1855.

<sup>12</sup> W. G. Brownlow to John Bell, January 15, 1856, John Bell Papers, Library of Congress; *Raleigh North Carolina Weekly Standard*, January 2, 1856.

<sup>13</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 34 Cong., 1 Sess., Pt. 1, 167-68; *Washington National Intelligencer*, January 21, 1856.

assert that the Catholicism of Louisiana for this reason was of an entirely different species than that which the "Irish Hierarchy" taught and which was practiced by Archbishop John Hughes and Monsignor Gaetano Bedini.

The Southern delegates were not so well pleased when the John Rufus Edie delegates from Pennsylvania were admitted by a vote of 84 to 45. The latter had renounced the twelfth section and were opposed by a contesting delegation that was more conservative. When the vote on their credentials was taken, the South's vote plus half of those of New York and one each from Delaware and Pennsylvania were in the negative. A Tennessean left in anger swearing that he was through with the deliberations of the Council.<sup>14</sup>

The true interest of this Council, which had met to draw up a platform for the campaign of 1856, was concerned with the twelfth section. The Southern members lacked sufficient strength to save this section. The Northern delegates early won their victory and command of the Council when they were able to change the mode of voting from seven to each state to the proportionate number of votes the states had in Congress. The change was supposed to have been initiated at the next regular meeting, but not at a special meeting such as this one. The majority resolved that since the twelfth section had neither been "proposed by the South nor sanctioned by the North" it should be stricken out and the party should abide by the principles and provisions of the constitution. The deletion of the twelfth section made necessary the construction of an entire new platform. The "Washington Platform," which had previously been formulated and published by Vespasian Ellis in the *American Organ*, was substituted. The Southern states voted 32 to 24 for its adoption, with several states not voting and some delegates absent. A. R. Boteler of Virginia rose in anger, called the Northern Americans abolitionists, and said that the time had come to part. He moved adjournment sine die. Only with difficulty was he persuaded to withdraw the motion. Others made similar motions.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Brownlow, *Americanism Contrasted*, 86-89; *Baltimore Sun*, February 27, 1856; *Raleigh Weekly Register*, February 27, 1856.

<sup>15</sup> *Fort Smith Herald*, April 6, 1856; *Washington National Intelligencer*, February 23, 1856; *Washington Weekly American Organ*, February 15, 1856; DuBose, *Life and Times of William Lowndes Yancey*, 313-16.

The removal of the twelfth section was undeniably a victory for the North as it was distinctly a Southern plank; yet the sixth section of the new platform, which in a sense replaced it, was not a Northern plank. It was a change from proslavery to neutrality. This sixth plank pledged "unqualified recognition and maintenance of the reserved rights of the states," plus harmony and good will with noninterference by Congress and other states in any state's private affairs. Politically it was a wise thing. If the party was to carry any appreciable part of the North it would have to be moderate, to say the least, in its expressions on slavery. John Minor Botts had long seen this and had been writing letters to various Southern state councils and leaders urging them to recognize that practicality and selfish desires did not always correspond. He like Vespasian Ellis predicted defeat as certain if the South insisted on keeping the twelfth section. Naturally the extremists on both sides were dissatisfied. Some felt as did G. S. Shanklin of Kentucky that the new platform was an "attempt to dupe the people," that it was vague and unmeaning, a political trick, and a sacrifice of principle.

Before dissension could come to a head, the National Nominating Convention convened in the same city on February 22. This was an appropriate date and setting for the "America for Americans" and their expressions of admiration for Washington, "the Sons of '76," and the "Constitution." Two Southern states did not have delegations present, Georgia and South Carolina. Certain Northern delegates protested the platform drawn up by the National Council and offered an amendment endorsing the restoration of the Missouri Compromise and criticizing the admission of the Louisiana delegation. When their resolution was tabled, the delegates from Minnesota, Wisconsin, and a few delegates from other Northern states withdrew. They called a convention to meet July 18 in New York to nominate a candidate. The forty-two seceding delegates were a little less than 19 per cent of the 227 delegates.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> An Old Line Whig, *Reflections and Suggestions on the Present State of Parties* (Nashville, 1856), 50; Horace Greeley and John F. Cleveland, *A Political Text-Book for 1860* (New York, 1860), 23; John Carroll Noonan, *Nativism in Connecticut 1829-1860* (Washington, 1938), 279-80; Brownlow, *Americanism Contrasted*, 15; Frankfort *Weekly Kentucky Yeoman*, January 18, 1856.



Several Southerners received consideration: Garrett Davis, John Bell, John J. Crittenden, Sam Houston, and Kenneth Rayner. Houston held high hopes for his preconvention candidacy. The New York *Sun* also advocated his running as an "independent" candidate, which Houston fancied for a time. He wrote a friend a month after the nomination had been made that Andrew J. Donelson had told him in January that Tennessee's delegation would support him if the convention could be postponed.<sup>17</sup> Southerners had felt that short prenotification and poor transportation would give Northerners with good railroads an advantage in attendance. There had been a concerted effort in Mississippi to postpone this convention until July in order to "save the unity" of the party. Georgia refused to send delegates because she wished postponement until after May 1. Houston was evidently of the belief that Donelson maneuvered him into an unfavorable position in the interest of Fillmore. Houston stated that he had authorized his name to be submitted and felt neither regret "nor mortification. I am perfectly happy, and if I wished to be president, I would much rather take my chances, as a 'National Candidate,' and go before the people without any Platform but the 'Union and the Constitution' than to rely on the nomination of the Convention, and accept the platform sent forth by the meeting at Philadelphia." He privately told his correspondent that he did not believe that this platform would get public support. Fillmore he criticized, declaring he would "support no man who skulks the responsibility, or maintains a position of a Bat, that he can be Bird or Beast, as victory may incline." Houston felt there was no hope that Fillmore could carry any state in the South except Kentucky. When "Poor Donelson" called on him after the nominations were made he told him "kindly and calmly" that he would not speak in behalf of the ticket because he could not endorse the platform. Donelson requested him then not to do anything against it, and Houston agreed, with the mental reservation that "dead Ducks needed no killing."

Later, after he had cooled off, he revised his resolutions and judgment. He advised a friend in a letter from the Senate Chamber, "I am out for Fillmore and Donelson. You will see my letter

<sup>17</sup> Cf. W. G. Brownlow to A. J. Donelson, March 24, 1856, Donelson Papers.

in the New York Herald in a few days. Fillmore is rising daily and will no doubt get New York. He is gaining in many states." <sup>18</sup>

John J. Crittenden also fancied himself as presidential timber. He wrote a friend confidentially: "I have never therefore *put forward* my pretensions as to the Presidency, much less pressed them, nor have I ever endeavored, from any selfish feeling to put the claims or pretensions of any man. But not withstanding all this, I have a pride of character, which does not permit me to humble myself so far, as to shrink from or to decline even the presidency itself if offered." <sup>19</sup> Among others mentioned for the candidacy were Jacob Broom of Pennsylvania, and George Law of New York. The latter was unpopular in the South. The ambitious Law, who had been used as a stalking horse by the anti-Fillmore elements of the party, was set aside and read out of the party in New York.<sup>20</sup> All these maneuverings were to no avail. Fillmore had been the popular choice of the rank and file for some time. The party leaders were in accord, and he was nominated on the second ballot. The vote stood, Millard Fillmore, 179; George Law, 24; Kenneth Rayner, 14; John McLean, 13; Garrett Davis, 10; Sam Houston, 3. Fillmore received all the Southern votes except 19 which were scattered among Law, Davis, and Houston. R. K. Call, Rayner, Bartlett, Percy Walker, and Donelson were nominated for the vice-presidency. The last was victorious on the first ballot.

When the results were known, several Southerners who had "seceded" returned. R. K. Call of Florida on returning threw his arms around Brownlow, and Percy Walker announced that he wished no better company than the descendants of the men who had first set foot on Plymouth Rock. Brownlow in his exuberance announced that he was going home to campaign, and would "jump higher and roar louder than any other man in the State of Tennessee." <sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Sam Houston to Mrs. Ana S. Stephens, March 22, 1856, Sam Houston Papers; *id.* to Dr. Irion, August 1, 1856, *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> J. J. Crittenden to Albert T. Burnley, February 16, 1856, Crittenden Papers, Duke University.

<sup>20</sup> Richmond *Whig and Public Advertiser*, July 24, 1855; Scisco, "Political Nativism in New York State," *loc. cit.*, 182, 183.

<sup>21</sup> *Harper's*, XII (1856), 690; Collins, *History of Kentucky*, 74; Greeley and Cleveland, *A Political Text-Book for 1860*, 23; DuBose, *Life and Times of William Lowndes Yancey*, 315.

All the delegates were not so enthusiastic. When the Alabama State Council had met to select the delegates to the National Council they had given them instructions in the form of resolutions. In unequivocal language the resolutions took a strong and advanced stand on Southern rights in the territories. The second resolution stated that the power to exclude slavery in a territory resided only in those people elected to form a constitution preparatory to the state's admission. The fourth resolution was similar to the Democratic "Alabama Platform" of 1848 and pledged not to affiliate with any party or to help elect any man who did not publicly and firmly take this stand.

Two of Alabama's delegates, Alex White, a former member of the House of Representatives, and George D. Shortridge, the party's candidate for governor in the previous election, rejected the platform and the candidates because of "sparse representation of the South in the convention and council" (their statements of the number of Southern delegates does not tally with other sources), and because it ignored the slavery question. Feeling continued to be high in Alabama. Luke Pryor, the American candidate for the Federal Senate, refused to serve as a Fillmore elector. Holding the slavery question to be the paramount issue, he rejected the platform and supported Buchanan by attempting to rally the "conservatives."<sup>22</sup>

In Mobile the American mayor, John M. Withers, renounced the party and resigned his office and was later re-elected in this predominately American stronghold. The course of Percy Walker was a little more tortuous. A former Democrat, he had been one of the leaders in the National Council and National Convention. He had served as the minority chairman of the credentials committee and had spoken for two hours against the admission of the John Rufus Edie delegation. When they had been seated he left, only to return after the new platform was adopted by the Council. Walker and some of the other Southern delegates refused to recognize the right and authority of the Council to frame a platform. Since the Convention which followed the Council meeting took no action on the platform, Walker continued under the assumption that the June platform of 1855 was

<sup>22</sup> DuBose, *Life and Times of William Lowndes Yancey*, 212-13, 315; Gainesville (Alabama) *Independent*, March 20, May 17, 1856.

still in force. He had favored and endorsed Fillmore until Fillmore accepted the new platform, which he felt was not strong enough in its state-rights expressions. In a speech before the House he reviewed his position and analyzed the two American platforms. As an "appendix" to his speech, which he acknowledged was intended only for his constituents, he offered to resign his seat if sufficient county conventions met and requested him to do so.<sup>23</sup> He served his term out and did not offer for office again.

Albert Pike, who had played a prominent part in the Arkansas party and in the February Council as well as the June Council of 1855, where he had tried to get the party to exclude completely the question of slavery from the platform, refused to support Fillmore. He published a letter, "To the American Party South," which received wide circulation and much attention. In this long letter Pike denounced the new platform as unsafe to the South because of the removal of the twelfth section. He felt that this twelfth section had been none too strong, but was a necessary concession to the North, who had agreed to pass over the question of the power of Congress to legislate on slavery in the territories and pledged that this power would not be exercised. Pike and the Arkansas State Council had favored the nomination of some Northerner whose antecedents had been Democratic, to avoid substantiation of the charge that the American Party was just a "Whig trick."<sup>24</sup> Pike did not favor abandonment of the American Party or principles, but wanted to cut loose from "free soilism." He advocated the calling of a Southern American convention to draw up a new set of principles incorporating the twelfth section. William Russell Smith of Alabama advocated a similar plan.

Fortunately for the party's welfare, Pike's suggestions received short shrift, as likewise did an attempt of the Northern seceders to nominate a ticket of Robert F. Stockton and Kenneth Rayner for President and Vice-President. The story of this nomination is an interesting one. L. D. Scisco says that around this incident are the

<sup>23</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 24 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 1173-77; Cahaba (Alabama) *Dallas Gazette*, August 23, September 5, 1856; Allsopp, *Albert Pike: A Biography*, 327-35.

<sup>24</sup> He resigned as a delegate and announced that it was the last political office he ever intended to hold, Fort Smith *Herald*, April 5, 1856.

coils which broke the national party into sectional lines and destroyed the hope of Fillmore's election.<sup>25</sup> In brief, the Northern seceders had called their meeting in New York on June 11 intending to shelve George Law and put N. P. Banks forward for President. Banks was by then a Republican and it was planned to have the national Republican Convention endorse their nomination. Against this betrayal of party and adhesion to pure abolitionism, there was a group of seceders from the seceders who met and nominated Stockton and Rayner on June 17. Their platform attacked Charles Sumner and the repeal of the Missouri Compromise.

Rayner's letter declining the nomination is worth considering, as it became a campaign document. As was usual with Rayner, he took great pains to be conciliatory and courteous, especially as the seceders were potential allies. He disagreed with them, he said, not on principle, but on means. He set forth the three primary purposes of the party as he conceived them: first, the inauguration of intense feelings of nationalism in the administration and in the hearts of all citizens; second, the maintenance of civil and religious freedom in the face of the "daring encroachment and corrupting tendencies of the Roman Church" arrayed politically with the Democratic Party; and third, the preservation of the National Union against all factions. He warned that the feeling of Americans that the party was strong enough to carry sectional and domestic questions meant defeat. While not approving of the platform's attitude on slavery, Rayner promised to do his best to aid Fillmore. He did so, and spoke widely in the North and East. His part in the fusion movement in Pennsylvania will be noted later.<sup>26</sup>

The new platform was received by the majority of Americans with approbation. If the reception was not overjoyous, it was nevertheless given full support. A few at first hesitated because they felt that the Northerners had control of the party and because they wished to see the eventualities before they committed themselves. The decision to abandon many of the objectionable

<sup>25</sup> Scisco, "Political Nativism in New York State," *loc. cit.*, 179-83.

<sup>26</sup> Raleigh *American Signal*, July 9, 1856; Cluskey, *Political Text-Book or Encyclopedia*, 481.

features of secrecy, ceremonials of initiation, and religious tests was favorably received throughout the South.

A Kentucky paper, the *Paris Citizen*, professed to see the new platform as a Southern one proposed by Southern men, which if the North could stand, the South certainly could. A Georgia editor, to the accusation that the Council had prostituted itself to abolitionism, retorted by showing that Northern papers had charged that the Council had prostituted itself to slavery.

The *True American*, published at Marion, Alabama, would have preferred the June, 1855, platform, but was "aware that the Americans of the North felt themselves constrained, if not by their own convictions, by a knowledge of the public sentiments of their section," and was willing to make concessions.

As Fillmore had been generally popular in the South, few murmurs were heard among the Americans there at his nomination. A Virginia editor wrote that with Fillmore as the candidate he cared nothing for a platform or profession of principles. Another endorsed him "in ignorance" of his sentiments and views on the principles of the American Party and the Kansas question, feeling that his past record made him acceptable. The *American Organ* hastened to print excerpts from American papers from all sections of the South endorsing Fillmore and the platform. Fillmore had been abroad when nominated. On landing at New York he made a speech, a short excerpt of which was carried at the mast heads of the American papers, to show that he was a candid, independent, nonsectional candidate: "If there be those, North or South, who desire an administration for the North as against the South, or for the South as against the North, they are not the men who should give their suffrages to me. For my own part, I know only my country, my whole country, and nothing but my country." As a "national" candidate must be safe on slavery, attention was devoted to his past record on this question. The Democrats went to great lengths to establish his opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, his approval of squatter sovereignty, and his endorsement of the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. Not only was he accused of being an ally of "black Republicanism" but one editor went so far as to assert: "For our part we do

not scruple to say it, that we would sooner see Frémont, traitor as he is to the home of his birth, the President of the United States than Mr. Fillmore who never ceased to hate and persecute the South until the South had bought him off with the Vice-Presidency." <sup>27</sup> Fillmore's lack of "Americanism" and his visit to the Pope on his recent tour brought forth occasional jibes.

The Kentucky Grand Council endorsed Fillmore's record for having enforced the fugitive-slave law. Fillmore, they promised, would resist the sectionalism that induced higher law and would hold in check the vote of foreign immigrants in the territories. They declared that Fillmore was supporting the Compromise of 1850. This was true, as was shown by the National Platform and Fillmore's Albany speech, although he was somewhat vulnerable on the point because at the time he had been adverse to the repeal of the Missouri Compromise.

During the summer there was a wave of ratification meetings held endorsing the platform and lauding the candidates, with nativism accepted as a more or less minor issue. As the campaign progressed, these meetings began to change their form and became Fillmore and Donelson clubs, not only to salve the feelings of the Whigs but to enable seceders from the American Party to participate with good face. In Georgia a state mass meeting with some 20,000 claimed present was held. Resolutions were made to form county and district Fillmore and Donelson clubs. A state committee of five was appointed to keep speakers in every community. Another committee of ten was to solicit campaign funds and to supervise the printing and distribution of campaign documents, an illustration of how for the purposes of the campaign, and for future organization, the new party machinery was abandoned and the regular customary party methods of campaigning adopted.

In most sections similar plans were followed, as in New Orleans, where the executive committee called meetings to organize clubs which became not dry discussion groups of graybeards, but centers of interest for men, young boys, and even women. Parades, processions, military drills, banks, picnics, flag raisings, fireworks,

<sup>27</sup> *Augusta Weekly Chronicle and Sentinel*, October 1, 1856, quoting *Atlanta Intelligencer*.

and political harangues by local and imported talent, all helped to raise enthusiasm. Some of the clubs met weekly, some fortnightly.

The campaign was fought with vigor by the Americans, even in those states where there appeared but little hope of victory. State and local electors stumped the country and were heard by large audiences, sometimes running to ten and twenty thousand. In Georgia Benjamin Hill engaged in a triangular duel against three of the "biggest guns" the Democrats could muster, Robert Toombs, Alexander H. Stephens, and Joe E. Brown. Even the opponents of Hill conceded that he was a match for them.<sup>28</sup> In his debates Toombs stuck closely to the Kansas-Nebraska Bill and vilification of the Know-Nothings, whom he "despised, always had despised, and always would despise . . . and shun . . . in the streets." Hill accused the Democrats of allowing immigrants to pour into the country at such a rate that Southern emigration to Kansas was no longer possible, and then suddenly repealing the Missouri Compromise. Hill pointed out that the vision of a slave Kansas was chimerical, as the squatters from Ireland, the miners of England, and the felons and paupers from all of Europe had closed it far more effectively than would have a Wilmot Proviso.

In a six-hour debate with Linton Stephens, in which he spoke three and one-half hours, Hill mocked the Democratic attachment to the "rich Irish Brogue" and "sweet German Accents." These phrases were often encountered during the campaign. John C. Frémont, he asserted, was a Northern and sectional candidate, and James Buchanan a Southern sectional candidate, while Fillmore was the only national candidate.

The four most capable orators of the Alabama Americans were William Russell Smith, Henry W. Hilliard, Thomas H. Watts, and Jeremiah Clemens. The accession of the last to American ranks was widely heralded throughout the South. He worked actively in the campaign, speaking over all the state but concentrating in north Alabama. Clemens hit at the record of the Democratic Party on slavery and their lack of support of Southern railroad interests. His strictures on the expenses of Pierce's administration and the use of foreigners in office caused the Demo-

<sup>28</sup> Stephens lost his temper at being outmaneuvered by such a young and inexperienced man and challenged Hill to duel, which Hill refused, *Augusta Daily Chronicle and Sentinel*, October 29, 1856.



crats of C. C. Clay, Jr.'s district to write Clay posthaste to send rebuttal material from Washington.<sup>29</sup>

In every state during the campaign of 1856 the most influential and most widely known men were in great demand. Whenever possible, visiting "statesmen" were given an opportunity to present a fresh face to the audiences. On July 10, three wards of the city of Baltimore held a joint mass meeting at which W. A. Lake of Mississippi spoke to an assemblage of 6,000 people. Thomas Swann and Henry Winter Davis also spoke. At a grand mass meeting in Frederick City, Maryland, on August 9, some 20,000 Americans gathered. There were 372 carriages, which took over one hour to pass. After band music and a barbecue, John S. Carlisle and A. R. Boteler of Virginia; Jacob Broom and Henry M. Fuller of Pennsylvania; J. D. Roman, James A. Pearce, and several others from Maryland; R. P. Trippe of Georgia; John Cunningham of South Carolina; and Humphrey Marshall of Kentucky spoke. The fact that there was a large number of speakers did not mean that they were less accomplished in making long political harangues than their contemporaries, but that there were several speaker's stands, which made it possible for several speeches to be made simultaneously from morning till late that night. An analysis of the speeches of these men shows that they were largely concerned with unionism and the sectional dangers of a nonnational party victory, though some attention was given to nativistic doctrines.<sup>30</sup>

At a mass meeting in Washington, Crittenden, Lake, and Marshall spoke. In New Brunswick, New Jersey, Davis and Marshall spoke. Several speakers from Kentucky participated in a rally at Cincinnati on September 27. Here the mottoes read, "Buchanan and War," "Frémont and Disunion," and "Fillmore and Peace." H. W. Miller, who was in demand as a speaker in his native state of Virginia and in the neighboring state of North Carolina, was the principal speaker at the state rally held at Selma, Alabama, on August 21. Some five to eight thousand heard him.

Many of these meetings were not trumped-up affairs but the results of careful preparation by the participants and those in

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, August 17, 1856; DuBose, *Life and Times of William Lowndes Yancey*, 332-33; J. D. Rathers to C. C. Clay, Jr., July 29, 1856, Clay Papers.

<sup>30</sup> *Baltimore Patriot*, July 12, August 11, 1856.

charge of the grounds and buildings where they were held. The hands of the ladies were often evident in extensive decoration and a profusion of food. On one occasion at Selma on September 23, to a crowd of some 4,000, about 1,500 pounds of cake were proffered. One cake weighed 170 pounds, another 110 pounds. Three had sizable flags in them. Some 150 ladies helped at the tables, which stretched for eighty yards. The meeting was continued into the night and large fires were lighted.

After a parade a mile and a half long, lighted by 1,500 torches and 40 transparencies, enlivened by three bands, cheered by Terre Haute's "Ship Constitution" with its twelve portholes and its masts full height, rigged and manned, with 4,000 men marching, a huge St. Louis crowd heard delegates from Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois eulogize Fillmore. At New London, Missouri, three hours of speeches in the afternoon and five more hours from seven till midnight did not suffice and the addresses were continued the next night.

One young man wrote his sweetheart from East Feliciana, Louisiana:

There is but little news in this part of Creation that would interest you. We have nothing here but political excitement, Know Nothings, Whigs, Democrats, flag raisings, barbecues, speakings, torch light processions, etc., but I believe you care but little about the political world, so I will not tax your patience with that sort of talk. I will tell you however something about the great barbecue at Jackson on the 13th inst. The procession was two miles long—and besides it 840 carriages entered town from the same direction. The crowd was estimated at 5,000 persons. We had two bands of music—banners and flags in profusion—two cannons—and everything that could add to the beauty and interest of such a pageant— We had four of the best speeches I have ever heard— "Meat and bread in great profusion," and Cakes, Candies, ice cream, *ladies* and other sweetthings in abundance—I enjoyed myself very much indeed.<sup>31</sup>

Issues over which the Democrats and Americans quarreled were much the same as they had been before. The change of alle-

<sup>31</sup> Thomas W. Ellis to Martena Hamilton, September 20, 1856, Ellis Papers.

giances to the American Party had about ceased, but there were occasional opportunities to brag, especially with the revival of the Whig Party. The Democrats were more fortunate and could announce the accession of a number of important men as well as lesser lights. Senator T. G. Pratt of Maryland announced his decision to support Buchanan for the presidency because he felt slavery was endangered. Senator J. C. Jones of Tennessee in a lengthy speech before the Senate on August 9 reviewed his position with respect to the American Party. He would vote for Fillmore, he said, if he had any chance of being elected, but he saw none.<sup>32</sup> This argument of "no chance" was perhaps the most telling of all those leveled at Fillmore. It was repeatedly made and repeatedly, though at times halfheartedly, refuted. From Alabama a friend wrote Clay that while he was an old Whig and a warm admirer of Fillmore, he might be constrained "by a sense of duty" to vote for Buchanan.<sup>33</sup>

J. J. Slocum reluctantly wrote his cousin, T. C. W. Ellis, in an appraisal of political conditions in Louisiana that "I could name several of the most prominent Americans that will vote for Buchanan."<sup>34</sup> James M. Collum reported to John Bell from Pulaski, Tennessee, that former Democrats who had gone into the American Party upon finding themselves in minority were going back to their old allegiance not because they admired Buchanan over Fillmore as a man but because of sectional alarm.<sup>35</sup> Senator J. A. Pearce of Maryland, who had bolted to the Democrats, gave as a reason for so doing (in a public letter in August, 1856) the lack of the remotest chance for Fillmore's election. Yet in a confidential letter to R. M. T. Hunter he expressed opposite fears. After indicating the local political situations of the several states of Florida, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, Virginia, and Indiana, he asked if there was any hope from Alabama. Anticipating that the election would be thrown into the House, he rejoiced at Democracy's success in Pennsylvania.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Baltimore *Patriot*, August 6, 1856; *Cong. Globe*, 34 Cong., 1 Sess., Pt. 3, 2010-16.

<sup>33</sup> A. C. Beard to C. C. Clay, Jr., July 7, 1856, Clay Papers.

<sup>34</sup> J. J. Slocum to T. C. W. Ellis, September 16, 1856, Ellis Papers.

<sup>35</sup> James M. Collum to John Bell, August —, 1856, Bell Papers.

<sup>36</sup> J. A. Pearce to R. M. T. Hunter, October 17, 1856, in Ambler (ed.), *Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter, 1826-1876*, II, 198-99.

Some of Democracy's uneasiness was due to lack of real enthusiasm for Buchanan himself. He was looked upon as a Northern compromise nominee, as Pierce was too pro-Southern to get Northern votes. Some Democratic papers hung back several weeks before swinging into support. C. C. Clay, Jr., writing to his father, indicated this feeling when he said:

Yet *Entre Nous*, and in profound confidence, it [the Democratic ticket] does not suit me, or any Southern Rights man I have seen, who spoke to me confidentially. It is a ticket for the Union Wing of the Southern Democracy such as Houston, Cobb of Georgia et id omne genus. . . . The Atlantic States of the South and the Gulf States except La. will be the only faithful representatives of the strict Constitution Faith and will curse Buchanan as bitterly as the North abuses Pierce. . . . There is, now, no nationality in the party on the former issues. . . . [Pierce] will prove the last of the Tribune, I fear.<sup>37</sup>

W. B. Ochiltree, an old Whig of Texas, who had supported the American Party, announced he was laying Americanism and Whiggery aside, at least temporarily, to vote for Buchanan as the only hope to defeat the abolitionists. He had the highest opinion of Fillmore but felt his vote would only be thrown away.<sup>38</sup> The Americans answered by insisting that a Southern state going either to Fillmore or Buchanan would not help Frémont at all. The Democrats continued to claim that a vote for Fillmore was a dangerous contribution to Frémont's election.

There was perhaps one instance, in Pennsylvania—where many felt the election would be decided, in which Southern Americans could be charged with aiding and abetting Frémonters. Buchanan was almost sure of 112 electoral votes from the South. One hundred and forty-nine were needed. Frémont was certain of about the same number as Buchanan. Pennsylvania had 27 votes. The Pennsylvania Americans were caught between two fires. Party strategy dictated a fusion, which was made in the October state elections with the Democrats winning by a scant 3,000 votes out of some 432,000 votes. With only days before the presidential election, another fusion scheme was hatched. It was

<sup>37</sup> C. C. Clay, Jr., to C. C. Clay, Sr., June 7, 1856, Clay Papers.

<sup>38</sup> Rusk (Texas) *Cherokee Sentinel*, May 10, 1856.

planned to have one electoral ticket printed with two different heads, one Fillmore, the other Frémont. The electors were to be pledged to vote according to the relative percentages cast by the Americans and Republicans.

Kenneth Rayner was invited to visit Pennsylvania and speak in favor of "Union and Fillmore." The Democrats charged it was really "Fusion and Frémont." In his letter of acceptance from Raleigh, October 25, Rayner held it a slander and a wrong upon the conservative men of the South to accuse them of planning to destroy the Union. This letter, a subsequent letter, and his speeches on national unity were seized upon by the Democratic press, North and South, as final evidence of American and Republican fusion. How far Rayner directly followed this path is uncertain. In Philadelphia, where tens of thousands attended political speeches, Rayner opened the gate to Whigs and Republicans for a common fight against Buchanan.

On November 7 the Pennsylvania Know-Nothings sent Rayner a letter of thanks and tendered him a public dinner. "The result," the committee wrote, "in this state has proved, beyond all doubt, that if your prudent and conciliatory counsels had entirely prevailed, Fillmore would have secured at least thirteen electoral votes and the election would have been thrown into the House of Representatives, and the country been spared the certainty of Buchanan's election."<sup>39</sup>

Indirectly, since the national president of the party was a Southerner, another charge of fusion could have been leveled, had not the incident been so closely concealed. On October 29, an emissary arrived from Fillmore with the endorsement of National President Bartlett proposing to the Indiana State Council that they swing behind Frémont, throw Indiana to him, and thus help put the election into the House. The proposal was turned down because of the lateness with which it was made.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Raleigh *Weekly Register*, November 19, 1856; Raleigh *North Carolina Weekly Standard*, November 5, 19, 1856, quoting the *New York Times*, *Philadelphia News*, and the *Philadelphia Times*; Rhodes, *History of the United States*, II, 179.

<sup>40</sup> Raleigh *Weekly Register*, November 19, 1856; Raleigh *North Carolina Weekly Standard*, December 17, 1856. When Holden, editor of the *Standard*, persisted in using strong expressions in describing Rayner as an ally of fusionists and abolitionists, Rayner demanded retractions and thrashed Holden in the street, *ibid.*, December 3, 1856; Raleigh *Weekly Register*, December 3, 1856.

In Connecticut almost the entire American vote fused with the Republicans. In the northwestern states this was also true. In Massachusetts the party was emasculated by fusion in spirit and fact with the Republicans.<sup>41</sup> In East Tennessee there was some evidence of desire for fusion. W. C. Harrison wrote from Shelby County, "Some few of the Fillmore men are so desperate as to say that they would sooner vote for Frémont than Buchanan. But the number I am able to say is very few."<sup>42</sup>

When the Democrats exposed fusions with the Republicans in the North, and especially in Indiana, they were answered by evasion or assertions that the skirts of the Northern Democracy were also tinged with fusion.

An issue closely allied with the fusionist quarrel was that of abolitionism, which, though both parties were perfectly safe on the subject in the South, took more space and time in the newspapers than any other single question. The Democrats did their best to establish the association of abolitionists and Americans in the North and West, supplementing available evidence by giving credence to any groundless rumor.

That there was much fear among Northern Democrats that Americans and Republicans would effectively combine is unlikely. A Democratic Congressman from Pennsylvania wrote R. M. T. Hunter before the nominating convention that if a good candidate was selected, victory would be sure, as there was no danger of the Free-Soilers and Americans uniting. James Buchanan voiced his private opinion that the good in the Know-Nothing organization was their apparent determination to put down the slavery agitation, and that whether sincere or not, it would have some good effect in the North.<sup>43</sup>

A cursory examination of state political alignments shows that

<sup>41</sup> Brand, "History of the Know Nothing Party in Indiana," *loc. cit.*, 287-88; M. Evangeline Thomas, *Nativism in the Old Northwest 1850-1860* (Washington, 1936), *passim*; Noonan, *Nativism in Connecticut 1829-1860*, Chap. XIV; George H. Haynes, "A Know Nothing Legislature," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, I (1896), 186-87; Charles Stickney, "Know-nothingism in Rhode Island" in *Rhode Island Historical Society Publications*, I (1893-1894), 243-57.

<sup>42</sup> W. C. Harrison to W. H. Taylor, September 17, 1856, George C. Dromgoole Papers, Duke University.

<sup>43</sup> L. G. Tyler, *The Letters and Times of the Tylers*, 2 vols. (Richmond, 1885), II, 517.

in the North there was a strong abolitionist feeling, as was natural, among the nativists and that there was a mortal struggle carried on between those adherents who despite their free-soil principles wished to keep the party national and those who wished to merge in the abolitionist ranks. From the first stages, at least, well into the presidential campaign, the conservative Nationals were more or less dominant. The desertion of leaders such as W. H. Seward and N. P. Banks to the new Republican Party contributed to conservative defeat. Many Northern men used Know-Nothingism "to ride the fence" until they could choose the winning side.

As the American Party began to lose its prestige and suffered the reverse of the election of 1856, Northern councils moved largely into the Republican ranks, a course followed in Indiana, Illinois, and in the far Western and Northwestern states generally.<sup>44</sup> In New York, however, they maintained their integrity somewhat longer but at the expense of diminished ranks. In the South the Democratic press kept a microscopic eye turned toward the North. Any election, from municipal constable through the election of Federal Senators, any resolution or action by any local or state council, any remarks past or contemporary of prominent members that were in the slightest way tinged with abolitionism were flaunted in the face of Southern Americans, who undertook to disprove or to explain that which had to be admitted. In turn they attempted to expose, although somewhat ineffectively, the abolition tendencies of Northern Democrats. While they, too, had a sufficiency of evidence to use, they seemingly could not persuade Southern Democrats to aid their cause materially.

Apparently but little use was made of the name of "Andrew Jackson" Donelson to appeal to Democratic voters, though the Democratic papers foamed at the mouth for a time. He was, of course, given attention and endorsement, but it was purely of a secondary nature.

There were men in each locality who refused to associate with either party and continued to cherish the name Whig. In order to gain votes for Fillmore and perhaps to keep the party alive for the election of 1860 the Whig Party was called to a national conven-

<sup>44</sup> Brand, "History of the Know Nothing Party in Indiana," *loc. cit.*, 266-70; Cole, *The Era of the Civil War 1848-1860*, 138; Thomas, *Nativism in the Old Northwest*, *passim*.

tion at Baltimore in September. Five hundred delegates from twenty-five states were present, but none from Texas or South Carolina. Many of those who did attend had been prominent in American circles.<sup>45</sup>

It is impossible to know how many accessions were made by this step. Probably not many. Certainly no important leaders of the old party were enticed back by this convention. A few newspaper editors changed their allegiance. A wave of Whig ratification meetings spread over the country but were really an anticlimax, for in most places where there were groups acting as "Whigs," they had already held ratification meetings. The Democrats more than counterbalanced "Whig" strategy by boasting of the Whig leaders who had previously or recently joined Democratic ranks. Some had fought with the Americans, like Senators T. G. Pratt and J. A. Pearce and like William M. Burwell, the former editor of the *American Organ*. Others, as had Senator Judah P. Benjamin, held aloof from both Americans and Democrats until the presidential campaign got under way. Other well-known names supporting Buchanan included Percy Walker; Duncan Kenner; C. D. Fontaine, previous gubernatorial candidate in Mississippi; C. B. Baldwin; Representative Mordecai Oliver of Missouri; Charles J. Jenkins, late American candidate for governor in Georgia; former Senator Archibald Dixon; Representative Albert G. Watkins, Senator J. C. Jones, J. V. Clay, W. T. Avery, Oliver P. Temple, George Preston, J. T. Michie, former Representative D. M. Barringer, and former Senator Reverdy Johnson. Hosts of lesser lights, state legislators, and electors swung over also.

Generally, antforeign propaganda was not of primary importance in the national campaign, although the Irish were still condemned and the immigration evils still discussed. More attention was given to the German immigrants. Rural districts saw danger

<sup>45</sup> Raleigh *North Carolina Weekly Standard*, September 24, 1856; Helena (Arkansas) *Shield*, July 10, 1856; Little Rock *True Democrat*, August 5, 1856; Baltimore *Sun*, September 20, 1856; Frankfort *Commonwealth*, September 30, 1856. The offer of another political group to support Fillmore was passed by in silence. The order of United Americans wrote Donelson on July 25, 1856, offering to throw the influence of the "oldest of American organizations" devoted to "American policy" into the election, New York chapters of The United Order of Americans to Andrew Jackson Donelson, July 25, 1856, Donelson Papers.



EX-PRESIDENT  
**FILLMORE**  
GIVING THE KNOW NOTHING SIGN. 7

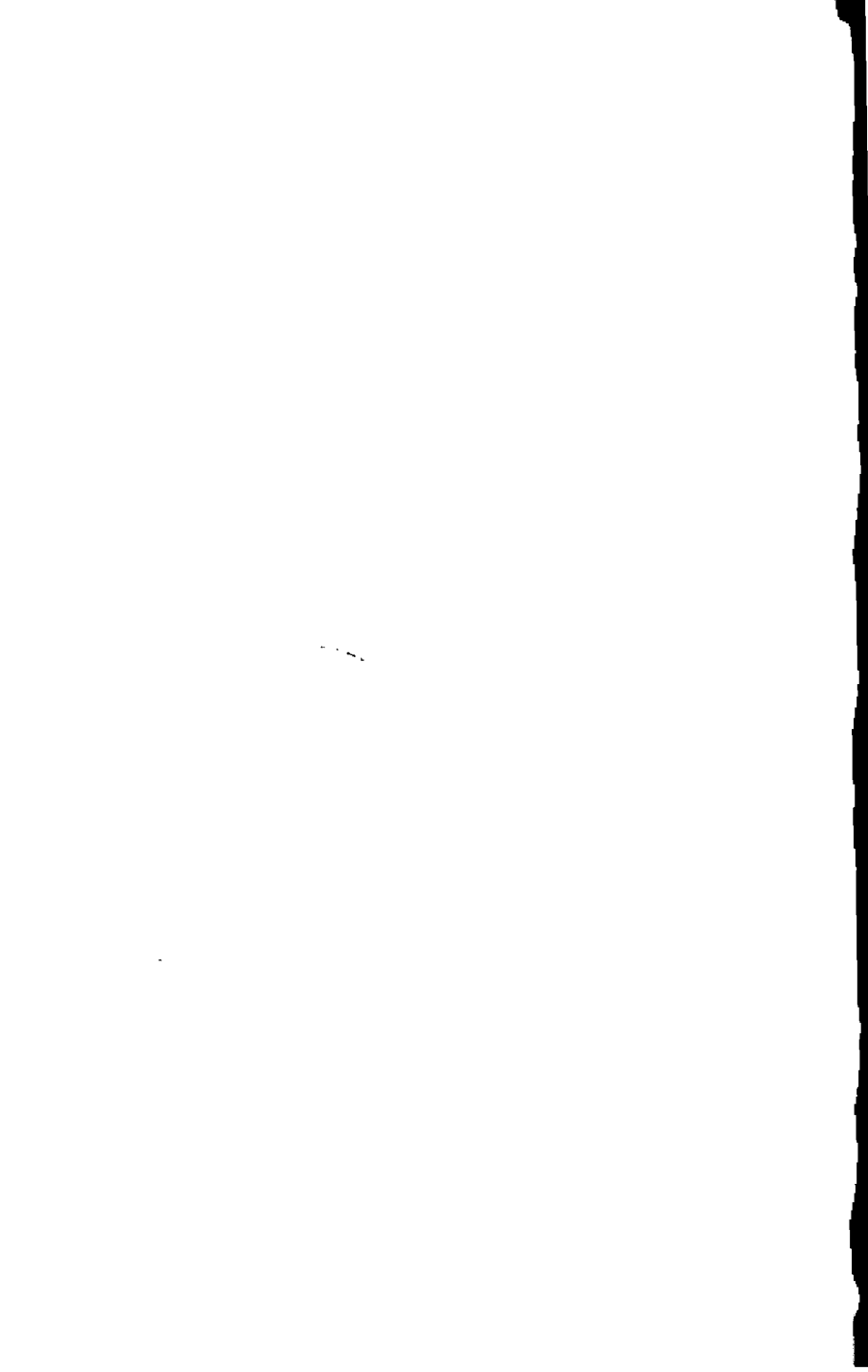


**FILLMORE!**

His SOLILOQUY.—"These secret Know Nothing signs, if properly adhered to, will elevate me once more to the Presidential Chair, and then these VILE Democrats may censure me as much as they desire, for instructing the authorities of Cuba to murder Crittenden and his men. But I must be cautious and admonish that impetuous fellow, Dan Rice, to make no more bets with Mississippians on my election, until I get a few more Democrats of that State to join us"

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FROM THE KOSCIUSKO (Miss.) *Southern Sun*, MARCH 10, 1855



from the "Sag Nicht demagogues" and protested against German antislavery beliefs, the activity of German newspapers and German societies. When Adolf Douai, former editor of the San Antonio *Zeitung*, spoke to a Northern German society and related his experiences as an abolitionist editor in a Southern state, the Americans pointed a finger, crying, "There, that's what we mean."

The Germans were largely antislavery. The three German newspapers in Baltimore were the oldest abolitionist sheets in the state. In 1860 out of eighty-eight German newspapers, eighty were abolition and the other eight silent on the matter. The *Wilkinson Whig* stated that fifty-six German newspapers in the United States formerly Democratic were Republican in 1856. The *Whig* knew of two such in Maryland, two in Missouri, one in Texas, and one in Louisiana.<sup>46</sup>

There were exceptions to criticism of Germans as in Louisiana where New Orleans nativists took pains not to alienate the Germans, but praised them as "they are neither *idlers*, nor loafers, nor whiskey-drinkers. They are industrious . . . they are frugal and they are comfortable in their circumstances. The denunciations of the American Party by the Irish can never excite the Germans to act against their best friends." In Missouri Fillmore received the free-soil German votes.

As the contest was drawing to its climax thirty Know-Nothing congressmen, including those from the South, issued an appeal to the voters to recognize the unusually important aspects of the current campaign, because its sectional aspects were fearful in nature, resulting from the Republicans and Democrats pressing one exciting issue after the other until the country was arrayed in hostile columns. Excitement and misconception, they continued, were leading men conservative on sectional issues to volcanic brinks which were likely to burst forth into civil ruin. They charged the Republican Party with only part of the guilt, the Democrats having striven "to madden the South" in order to concentrate votes on Buchanan.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, "The Influence of the Foreign Born of the Northwest in the Election of 1860," *loc. cit.*, 194; McConville, *Political Nativism in the State of Maryland*, 55; Baton Rouge *Sugar Planter*, August 2, 1856, quoting the New Orleans *Creole* as stating that the New Orleans *Staats Zeitung* was for Buchanan and the New Orleans *Deutsche Zeitung* was for Frémont.

The address ended with the congressmen pointing out that since the fate of the election seemed to hinge upon the uncertain oscillations of the foreign vote between the Republicans and Democrats, Americans ought to prevent the fate of the country from resting in the hands of such "mighty masses fresh from the monarchies of Europe."

On October 29 another joint appeal was made "to save the Union," signed by prominent party officials from Pennsylvania, Kentucky, New York, and Massachusetts.

During the campaign, pre-election estimates of the probabilities of success in various states were published by the Americans. Maryland was sure; Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, Louisiana, Texas, and Florida were listed as fairly sure in the South, as were also New Jersey, Delaware, and California. An examination of election returns shows that in most of these states the count was fairly close.

The Democrats were frightened, though they talked loudly and confidently.

When the votes of all the states except South Carolina (where the legislature chose the electors) were counted, Fillmore was in third place with 873,055 votes. Buchanan had 1,834,337 and Frémont 1,341,812. Fillmore received only the 8 electoral votes of Maryland. Buchanan got 174 electoral votes; Frémont, 114. Fillmore, with 25 per cent of the popular vote got only 2 per cent of the electoral vote; Buchanan's 45 per cent brought him 59 per cent of the electoral vote. Frémont, with 30 per cent of the popular vote, won 39 per cent of the electors.

In the South Fillmore polled 473,465 to 601,587 votes for Buchanan, with Frémont having a total of nearly 900. Fillmore lost Alabama by 1,800 ballots out of the 75,000 cast; Arkansas by 1,100 out of 33,000; Florida by 1,500 out of 11,000; Georgia by 12,000 out of 98,000; Kentucky by 7,000 out of 142,000; Louisiana by 2,000 out of 43,000; Mississippi by 11,000 out of 60,000; Missouri by 10,000 out of 107,000; North Carolina by 12,000 out of 85,000; Tennessee by 7,000 out of 140,000; Texas by 13,000 out of 44,000; and Virginia by 30,000 out of 150,000. Maryland was carried by 47,460 votes to Buchanan's 39,115. The composition of Congress will be considered later.

The Americans carried all the larger communities of the South, even St. Louis. In every Southern state except Tennessee the Americans polled substantial gains over the strength of the Whigs in 1852. This increase averaged about 25 per cent. In Tennessee the Americans polled 8,000 more votes than Scott, but the Democrats also gained some 16,000 new adherents. In North Carolina the Democrats showed a loss of 30,000 votes from their previous total in the preceding state election.

The Republicans had only a few supporters in Kentucky and Maryland. Though an abolitionist ticket had given Cassius M. Clay 3,600 votes in 1850, in 1856 Frémont got only 355. Many Americans had felt that the entry of the Republicans into Tennessee for Frémont would bring some 3,000 votes from the mountain sections to Fillmore. After the returns were in, the Democrats triumphantly held funeral rites for their opponents. One transparency in a victory celebration at Murfreesboro, Tennessee, bore the inscription:

SAMUEL, infant son of Abolitionism, was wounded by Henry A. Wise, of Va., in 1855, and died of public opinion, in the North, 1856.

Here lies Sam,  
As great a sham,  
As ever gulled a nation;  
He lived and lied,  
Blasphemed and died  
And now his doom's damnation.

## CHAPTER NINE

### SOUTHERN AMERICANS IN CONGRESS, 1854-1858

**D**URING THE year 1854 some of the debates in Congress gave minor evidence of the growing storm of nativism. Verbal sparring on the Senate and House floors was perhaps but a tentative step in choosing sides and formulating new issues. Yet the debates helped fan the flares of the curious combinations of ignorant prejudices, genuine alarm over the dangers of foreign Catholicism and other foreign influences, and political opportunism that made up Know-Nothingism. The debates can be grouped under four headings: first, the remarks made on the visit of the Papal Nuncio, Gaetano Bedini, to the United States; second, the debates on the religious rights of Americans traveling abroad (the Madiari affair); third, a home-  
stead bill; and fourth, the question of unnaturalized voting in the Kansas-Nebraska territories.

Senator Lewis Cass of Michigan, a staunch Democrat, on January 23, 1854, sponsored a resolution calling on the President to communicate to the Senate the correspondence between the Papal States and the Federal government regarding the mission of the Papal Nuncio, Bedini, to this country. It was rumored that Bedini had a secret project of establishing himself as a permanent resident Papal Nuncio. Cass was filled with "shame and regret" at the unkindly reception that Bedini had received in Cincinnati and at Baltimore, where three shots had been fired into windows of the home of Archbishop John Hughes while it was thought Bedini was there. In May, Cass precipitated another lengthy debate by denouncing Archbishop Hughes's letter on "Religious Freedom."

Likewise, the reintroduction of a homestead bill in 1854 found a number of Southern Senators, both Democratic and Whig, attacking the bill on nativistic and sectional grounds.<sup>1</sup> R. W. Johnson of Arkansas denounced it, and C. C. Clay, Jr., of Alabama, no friend of Know-Nothingism, warned:

A great deal has been said here in condemnation of what are called Native Americans, or Know-Nothings. I am neither one or the other, in the political sense of those terms; but let me ask the Senator from Iowa, who is the zealous friend and champion of the foreign population, whether there is any measure which could be conceived of, or projected, or passed by Congress, which is better calculated to excite, to foster, and encourage a Native American feeling, than this . . . bill? I tell him that, if this bill pass, he will see realized what I had hoped never to witness in this country—he will see a Native American, or Know-Nothing party growing up in the southern states of this Union. . . . But pass this bill, and impress upon the public mind throughout the South, the idea that, not content with sheer justice to foreigners, you will be generous to them, and unjust to your own citizens, and the spirit of Native Americanism will soon develop itself where, hitherto, it has been unfelt and almost unheard of.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps had the Americans been able to present their case in the South in the light of this speech the American Party would have been more successful.

During the final stages of debate on the homestead bill in the Senate, a harsh attack was launched on the Native Americans, seemingly with effect, for the bill was passed on July 21, 1854. The President, however, vetoed it. Among the eleven senators voting against the bill were C. E. Badger, John Bell, W. C. Dawson, J. C. Jones, J. A. Pearce, and T. G. Pratt, Southerners and Whigs.<sup>3</sup>

The debates on the homestead bill in the House did not touch, except indirectly, nativistic subjects, as was likewise true of the

<sup>1</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., Pt. 1, 742-49, 944-48, 1125-27, Pt. 3, 1740-49; Ranck, *Albert Gallatin Brown, Radical Southern Nationalist*, 135.

<sup>2</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., Pt. 3, 1705-1706.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., Pt. 3, 1775-79.

debates in the House on the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, although nativism was frequently interjected into the Senate debates. The few Southerners who voted against the bill, while condemning squatter sovereignty, did not make an issue of unnaturalized voting.<sup>4</sup> Emerson Etheridge of Tennessee, in his long fight against the passage, made only incidental reference to the incorporation of unnaturalized squatter vote.<sup>5</sup>

When the House convened in the fall of 1854, one of the first matters debated was the conduct of our ministers at Ostend. The discussion gradually drifted off into a denunciation of the policy of appointing foreign-born ministers to represent the United States, invoking the allegation that Know-Nothingism was being interjected.<sup>6</sup>

A. R. Sollers, a Representative from Maryland, introduced a bill to prevent importation of paupers and convicts, a favorite nativistic demand, and to prevent the enlistment of persons of foreign birth in the army and navy. The last day of the session this bill was laid on the table.<sup>7</sup> A similar bill was sponsored in the Senate by James Cooper of Pennsylvania, who made a strong nativistic speech in favor of investigating the evils of convict and pauper immigration. He cited instances of foreign governments shipping convicts, some of them still in chains, in state-owned vessels, and dumping them in New York, New Orleans, and Baltimore. He was alarmed at the great number of criminals of foreign origin in the courts; in Kentucky, sixty to one; in Mississippi, five to one; in Tennessee, fifteen to two; in South Carolina, twenty-eight to one; in Alabama, fifty to one; and in Georgia, six to one.<sup>8</sup> On December 11, 1854, Senator Stephen A. Adams of Mississippi, denying affiliation with the Americans, spoke in defense of his proposed naturalization law. He pictured the need of reducing immigration in order to preserve lands upon which the native population could expand. He showed how foreign voters were frequent inciters of riots and mobs and how easily they were organized, marched to the polls, and voted en masse.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., Pt. 1, 458-62, 521-28, 542, 550.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 830-37.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., 9, 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., 9, 1187.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., 12.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., 24, 26.



A week later N. P. Banks, a Representative from Massachusetts, precipitated a series of attacks and counterattacks upon the principles of the American Party. Most of the discussions were by Southern Representatives. During his speech Banks was frequently interrupted by William S. Barry of Mississippi, who flayed the Americans, agreeing with none of the propositions of Banks. He denied that the popes or the Catholic Church had ever asserted claims of temporal power any time, anywhere. He was particularly incensed over the danger of an organization which was secret and bound by oaths. He saw no need for alarm about pauper and criminal immigration, and felt that at any rate it was a local problem. His own state of Mississippi, with 5,000 foreign-born, had in his eyes no difficulties with them. He wanted to let the Northern states handle foreign assimilation if they cared to, for it was not a Southern problem. Abolitionism and Know-Nothingism he held up as twin brothers of destruction.<sup>10</sup>

Immediately after the Christmas holidays A. R. Sollers, in an hour's address, defended the tenets of the American Party, seeing its intense nationalism as its very lifeblood. He was replying to Barry of Mississippi and to L. M. Keitt of South Carolina, who had also attacked the party by declaring that its only consistency was that of "abolitionism, offering a sanctuary for malcontents and a hospital for changelings."<sup>11</sup> On January 11, 1855, L. M. Cox of Kentucky made a detailed answer to the current charges against the new party, particularly denying that it was tinged with abolitionism.<sup>12</sup>

William Russell Smith of Alabama on the fifteenth of January gave perhaps the most vigorous defense of the party that was delivered in Congress during this debate. He embraced all the purely nativistic features and did so without modification. Smith admitted that in making his proposals he had no hope of their even receiving consideration by a hostile House. He offered several solutions for the dangers of foreign immigration, which were largely of the nature of present-day immigration laws. He launched an attack upon the radical resolutions of the "Social

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., Appendix, 53-60    <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., 66-70.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., Appendix, 70-72.

Democratic Association of Richmond," doubting that even the second generation of such "insane fanatics" could be safely trusted with suffrage. He read the program and principles of the American Revolutionary League adopted at their Philadelphia convention of 1852. He quoted from a socialistic speech which had been delivered in New York to a German audience just a few days previously, in which the audience was advised to demand and put into practice the principles of the "social Republic." It contained such phrases as, "If you don't know your rights yet, hunger will teach them to you. When the wolf is hungry he has no consideration, and takes his food fearlessly where he finds it, it must be the same with the masses. Help yourselves and then God will help you. We must act as the wolf and we do not want any auxiliaries."

On the subject of secrecy, Smith was adamant. It was necessary and right. To him the "Jesuit's Oath," which he read, was ample justification to fight the devil with fire. He attacked the Jesuits directly and in harsh terms, luridly picturing them as a secret military organization with spies lurking in every cranny in every land, fawning on the rich and powerful, blackmailing the defenseless, intriguing even against the more desirable elements in their own church who sought to curb their power. Smith asserted that a Jesuit, because of mental reservation, could take no oath of allegiance to the government that would be binding.<sup>13</sup>

Smith's long tirade was followed within a few days by speeches by four Southern Democratic Representatives, Samuel A. Smith of Tennessee, J. A. Millson of Virginia, O. R. Singleton of Mississippi, and Thomas Ruffin of North Carolina.<sup>14</sup> None of these saw the slightest need for Know-Nothingism, as the few endorsable features (such as the more rigid enforcement of the existing state laws against pauper and convict immigration) could easily be handled by the Democrats.

While party principles were being discussed in Congress, American leaders kept a close eye on the continued accessions of members in the various states of the Union. The spring of 1855

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., Appendix, 94-103.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., Appendix, 151-55, 245-48, 266-67, 349-53.

brought high hopes of victories, both North and South. Optimism remained high until the crucial election in Virginia, lost largely from lack of good generalship, caused more sober realizations of the problems involved.

The Virginia election was a subject of comment over the entire nation months before the voting occurred. The Democratic campaign pamphlet, *Facts for the People of the South*,<sup>15</sup> explained the "deep solicitude" so widely felt in the country over this election as a reflection of the free-soilism in the North hoping to see the "bulwark of Southern Democracy" broken down.

Among those who believed the fate of the South depended on this election was Isaac E. Holmes, a Democratic Representative from South Carolina from 1839 to 1851, who wrote to R. M. T. Hunter: "I sincerely congratulate you on the success of the Virginia Election. I feared the result, and believe the victory truly auspicious. If the Know Nothings had succeeded, if the Frontier State of the Southern Confederacy had 'given-way' Our institutions would have been placed in great hazard."<sup>16</sup>

The Democrats universally gloated over "Virginia the Breakwater" where "Sam" could not beat "Uncle Sam." The Richmond *Enquirer* in its issue of June 7, 1855, carried excerpts from leading papers all over the country, North and South, rejoicing and commenting upon the importance of the election. In Philadelphia some 20,000 people gathered to celebrate the Virginia victory. In New York, likewise, a monster turnout was obtained. The *North Carolina Standard* predicted the disbanding of the party in the South within a short time as a result of this "test" election. The *Standard* believed that the result in the North would be utterly to sectionalize and abolitionize the party. A. C. Cole says that the defeat of the party in Virginia had a great moral effect on the Democrats who had affiliated with the Americans and that it was disastrous to the order in other states.<sup>17</sup>

However, as has been seen, the Southern Americans were not

<sup>15</sup> *Facts for the People of the South, Abolition, Intolerance, and Religious Intolerance United, Know Nothingism Exposed* (Washington, 1855), *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> Isaac E. Holmes to R. M. T. Hunter, March 13, 1855 in Ambler (ed.), *Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter 1826-1876*, II, 164.

<sup>17</sup> Cole, *Whig Party in the South*, 318.

dismayed and were successful in sending a strong delegation to the Thirty-fourth Congress, which met on the first Monday of December in 1855. This was the first to which the young party on a national scale had had an opportunity to send its representatives. It is somewhat difficult to ascertain exactly the party affiliations of members of either house, since some who said at the time or later that they were Whigs or Democrats were elected by the American Party. The *Congressional Globe*, which ordinarily distinguished between Whig and Democrat by printing them in italics, Roman, or small capital type, abandoned the practice for the Thirty-fourth Congress, though it was resumed later. The *Whig Almanac* classified the Senate as thirty-four Administration Democrats, and twenty-five in "Opposition," with thirteen vacant seats. In the House three divisions were given: the Friends of the National Administration (generally but not uniformly with Pierce and Douglas on the Kansas question) numbering 79; Whigs and Americans of proslavery tendencies numbering 37; and anti-Nebraska men numbering 117. There were a few vacancies. The Richmond *Enquirer* said that the Senate was composed of thirty-two Democrats, twelve Whigs, ten Abolitionists, three Americans, and five vacancies. The House was given as eighty-three Democrats, seventy-seven Whigs, seventy-three Americans, and one vacancy. W. S. Meyer says that this Congress gave the Know-Nothings five Senators out of sixty-two, and forty-three Representatives out of 237, who represented 875,000 votes out of some 4,000,000, or 22 per cent of the electorate. J. F. Rhodes gives the composition of the Senate as thirty-four Administration Democrats, thirteen Republicans, twelve Whigs or Americans, all but one of whom were from the slave states.<sup>18</sup>

The list following,<sup>19</sup> though subject to error because of the factors named above, has been made after an examination of actions and allegiances of the various men and shows the Southern American membership of the Senate and House.

<sup>18</sup> *Whig Almanac*, 1856, 3-4; Rhodes, *History of the United States*, II, n. 81.

<sup>19</sup> Richmond *Enquirer*, November 27, 1855; Raleigh *North Carolina Weekly Standard*, September 5, 1855; Fort Smith *Herald*, February 22, 1855; *Whig Almanac*, 1856, 3-4.

	<i>Senate</i>	<i>House of Representatives</i>
Alabama		Percy Walker William Russell Smith
Georgia		R. P. Trippe N. G. Foster
Kentucky	John J. Crittenden	J. P. Campbell L. M. Cox A. K. Marshall Humphrey Marshall S. F. Swope W. L. Underwood
Louisiana		George Eustis
Maryland		James B. Ricaud Henry Winter Davis H. W. Hoffman J. M. Harris
Mississippi		W. A. Lake
Missouri		Luther M. Kennett John G. Miller James L. Lindley Gilchrist Porter
North Carolina		R. T. Paine R. C. Puryear E. G. Reade
Tennessee		Emerson Etheridge Charles Ready Thomas Rivers W. H. Sneed Felix Zollicoffer
Texas	Sam Houston	L. D. Evans
Virginia		John S. Carlisle

It is perhaps in the protracted contest for the election of the speaker that the relative strength of the various parties can best be judged. From December 3, 1855, to February 2, 1856, the House was unable to do more than vote and wrangle over party divisions and affiliations. During this period the Americans played their only prominent part in the national halls. Here criticism and defense of party principles were made at length, much more so than would have been possible had the House been devoting this time to legislative business.

On the first ballot for speaker there were twenty-one nominees. One hundred and fifteen votes were necessary for election. William A. Richardson obtained 74 votes; Lewis D. Campbell, 53 votes; and N. P. Banks, 21 votes. Humphrey Marshall of Kentucky received support from his fellow Southern Americans. Other Southerners were honored with a few scattered votes. Among these were William Russell Smith, W. A. Lake, R. C. Puryear, Emerson Etheridge, Henry Winter Davis, Percy Walker, J. S. Carlisle, L. M. Cox, and James B. Ricaud. With the sixtieth vote taken on December 15, the delegations began to offer numerous substitute motions and proffers of realignment. These motions involved long-winded explanations either to other delegates or to their constituents at home of the reasons why or why not these motions were favored, rejected, or slightly amended. Flavored by sectionalism and hostility toward nativistic principles or what were conceived and asserted to be such principles, many speakers waxed warm and personal. The Americans were told very frankly that as far as the Democrats were concerned they had two choices, either to surrender lock, stock, and barrel to the Democrats, or to the Republicans, and that one of these two would organize the House. If they felt that the Democratic candidate was a lesser evil than the Republican candidate, then they could vote for the Democratic candidate. They were bluntly warned, "If you do so, you can expect nothing from him or from the party which he will, in that case, represent. We do not ask this of you. We can offer you nothing in return for it."<sup>20</sup>

Know-Nothings resented this arbitrary stand of the Democrats. They were alarmed over the possibility of the election of

<sup>20</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 34 Cong., 1 Sess., Pt. 1, 24, 27, 60.

an abolitionist speaker, but acceptance of Democratic terms would have meant surrender of party entity. A triumph of sectionalism<sup>21</sup> could not be expected to overcome the American Party's hope for the achievement of national unity as a party. They then supported a former Whig, Henry M. Fuller of Pennsylvania, showing, however, numerous evidences of desire and willingness to support Democrats, either Northern or Southern, provided they met the one essential test of being "national men" not nominated by a Democratic caucus.

The nativists were more than resentful of the interjection of coarse assaults during the election debates upon their principles. Felix Zollicoffer of Tennessee explained that perhaps the Democrats in the heat of campaign, where seemingly any sort of political morality was acceptable, might feel themselves justified in alleging any sort of imaginary blackguardism, "yet here, sir, in this deliberative body, when gentlemen who profess to stand with me in the maintenance of the Union and the Constitution—of the rights of the people North and South, deliberately undertake to stigmatize me in their party platform with occupying a position of antagonism to the civil and religious liberty of the people, they erect a barrier between us which it is difficult to pass."<sup>22</sup> This "insult" was one of the two important tests that was applied by Americans to each candidate or to each vote cast. The second was over the acceptance or rejection of the finality of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. Such was the feeling between the antagonists that there was but little chance of compromise.

C. C. Clay, Jr., wrote his father from Washington: "If that party [the Know-Nothings] and the Democrats could be united on some third man, he could be elected, but that, I regard as impossible. They are bitterly hostile as either is toward the Black REPUBLICANS."<sup>23</sup> The real efforts of the Americans during the speakership controversy were made to find a national Democrat for whom other Democrats would vote without involvement of the caucus ban. Gilchrist Porter of Missouri, a Democrat and former American voting with the Americans, at one time got the

<sup>21</sup> While the Democratic Party was not purely Southern, in the eyes of the Southern Americans it was fast becoming so.

<sup>22</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 34 Cong., 1 Sess., Pt. 1, 62.

<sup>23</sup> C. C. Clay, Sr., to C. C. Clay, Jr., January 3, 1856, Clay Papers.

American vote but the Democrats held back. At other times William Smith of Virginia and William Aiken of South Carolina were supported. To end the struggle and effect an organization of the House a plurality rule was adopted over the votes of most of the Southern Americans, which enabled Banks, who had deserted to Republican ranks, to take office.

The course of events in the House was followed with deep interest throughout the South. Southern Know-Nothing editors universally endorsed the conduct of their Representatives in their "vain effort to subdue abolitionism" and prevent sectionalism and discord and they fastened the blame on the Democrats for the election of Banks, a game at which the Democrats retaliated. An examination of the situation shows, however, that the Americans did do everything short of complete capitulation, while the Democrats refused to be tactful or conciliatory. The contest had been due to animosity on both sides and was, perhaps, good political strategy. The Know-Nothings, who held the balance of power between the Democrats and Republicans, were unable to profit by their position. While the Democrats suffered, the Americans did more so and never were able to play a major role in Congress.

After the election of 1856 the Americans played a decreasingly important part in national politics. In the Thirty-fifth Congress there were only five adherents among the sixty-four Senators. These were John B. Thompson and John J. Crittenden of Kentucky, Anthony Kennedy of Maryland, John Bell of Tennessee, and Sam Houston of Texas. In the House there were sixteen Americans: Robert Trippe and Joshua Hill of Georgia, W. L. Underwood and Humphrey Marshall of Kentucky, George Eustis of Louisiana, James B. Ricard, J. M. Harris, Henry Winter Davis, and Jacob M. Kunkel of Maryland, Thomas L. Anderson and Samuel H. Woodson of Missouri, John A. Gilmer and Zebulon B. Vance of North Carolina, and Horace Maynard, Charles Ready, and Felix Zollicoffer of Tennessee. Vance's classification is perhaps questionable. A few Northerners in Congress might also have properly been so designated.

In the Thirty-sixth Congress only Crittenden and Kennedy remained in the Senate, while American strength in the House had increased to twenty-three, which was more than a fourth of the



eighty seats of the South. These included Thomas Hardeman, Jr., and Joshua Hill of Georgia, F. M. Bristow, W. C. Anderson, Green Adams and Robert Mallory of Kentucky, Edward Bouigny of Louisiana, E. H. Webster, J. Morrison Harris, and Henry Winter Davis of Maryland, W. N. H. Smith, John A. Gilmer, and J. M. Leach of North Carolina, Thomas A. R. Nelson, Horace Maynard, W. B. Stokes, Robert Hatton, J. M. Quarles, and Emerson Etheridge of Tennessee, and A. R. Boteler of Virginia. There were only four party members from the North. Some of the Northern Democrats and Republicans had been partially elected by still-existent American support.

With nearly 29 per cent of the total representation of the South in the House of Representatives in those important sessions preceding the outbreak of the Civil War, one would expect to find the Americans speaking as a Southern group, although with considerable moderation. Stanchness to Southern principles did not protect them from attacks as the allies of abolitionists. Although almost universally endorsing the principles of the Dred Scott decision they were accused of opposing it. Thomas H. Watts protested against this misrepresentation in a letter to the *Montgomery Daily Mail*, May 6, 1857, by writing: "One of the principles which we as Americans have battled for is 'That in the territories none but citizens of the United States ought to vote in making laws or in framing a constitution preparatory to admission as a State into the Union.'

"The Dred Scott case (judging from the extract of the opinion published in the newspaper) has established as the constitutional doctrine the principles of the American Party."

The question of the admission of Kansas under the Lecompton Constitution came before Congress in March, 1857. In the Senate two Americans, Bell and Crittenden, voted with Douglas and the Republicans against it. In the House six Americans supported it; eight opposed. Similar differences of opinion occurred on the English bill.

When the Thirty-sixth Congress assembled in 1859 the Americans attempted to maintain their party identity. In the contest for speaker the Americans played a similar role to that which they had filled in the Thirty-fourth Congress. On the second of the

forty-four ballots, John A. Gilmer, an American from North Carolina, received 22 votes and was in third place. A fellow North Carolinian, Warren Winslow, was chairman of the committee appointed by a Democratic caucus to manage the party's affairs during this election. He refused to allow any of the Democratic votes to be cast for Gilmer. If Winslow and the three other Democrats from North Carolina had not feared enhancing Gilmer's local political strength, the South would have had a conservative in the chair. As it was, when Winslow finally agreed to support another North Carolina American, W. N. H. Smith, the opportunity for victory had slipped away.

On January 27, 1860, Smith with 112 supporters lacked only 3 votes of victory. When the Republicans shifted from John Sherman to William Pennington as their candidate, two Democrats and one American, Henry Winter Davis of Maryland, joined and thus gave victory to Pennington. The *North Carolina Standard* endorsed the failure of the Democrats to support Gilmer, saying, "The Democrats have thus far refused, and we think properly refused, to vote for Mr. Gilmer. We do not believe Mr. Gilmer desires to see the House organized until his 'Union Party' project shall have received all the strength it can from the present disorganized condition of things." Since the Union Party was taking concrete form during this time, there is some justification to these charges.

These incidents form the only actual instances where the Americans entered the limelight of Congressional politics. As a national party they had almost ceased to exist. An example of how party lines were breaking down under sectional strain is shown by the contested-election case of one of the American representatives from Maryland to the Thirty-sixth Congress. When Maryland declared that the unseating of the Know-Nothing representative in favor of the Democratic contestant would probably lead to the election of a Republican at the next election, the Southern Democrats deserted their fellow party member and sustained the incumbent.

On June 2, 1857, the National Council of the party assembled at Louisville. There ensued a warm debate upon proposed plans for reorganization. It was decided that the American Party in each

state and territory, and in the District of Columbia, was thereafter authorized to adopt such plans or organization as each state organization individually thought best suited to the views of members of its localities. The National Council was declared to be adjourned sine die but subject to the call of the new National Central Committee, whose chairman was thereafter to be the official head of the party. This was the last meeting of the national party as it was never revived and as a party functioned only in state politics. Among the signers of the address issued independently by some of the members of this convention were Anthony Kennedy of Maryland, Gilmer M. Hillyer of Mississippi, William F. Switzler of Missouri, John J. Crittenden of Kentucky, H. W. Hoffman of Maryland, and W. H. Sutton of Arkansas. Many Southern states and most Northern states were not represented.

## CHAPTER TEN

### AMERICAN PARTY PRESS AND TYPICAL PROPAGANDA

WHILE SOMEWHAT ineffectual efforts were being made to present favorably the party's principles in the halls of Congress, concerted plans were laid to press the fight where success was essential—to the individual voter. Book-length works of propaganda such as the *Defense of the American Policy*, *The Sons of the Sires*, *The Know-Nothing?*, *Priests' Prisons for Women*, and *The Great American Battle* were soon in circulation. But it was not the full volume or the shorter pamphlet upon which dependence was put. It was the weekly newspapers<sup>1</sup> and, at election time, the stump speakers that were counted on to convince those who had not succumbed to the appeals of the party's peculiar organization. The functions of a "press bureau" were even more imperative in the 1850's than at the present day. Telegraph service for news was largely nonexistent even in the major cities of the South. A country editor who, with the help of a printer's devil, had to find the news, write it, and sell it did not have much opportunity to write a great amount of political propaganda. He therefore depended largely on "clippings" from other papers. The American Party, as partial heir to the Whigs, found itself, especially in the South, well supplied with newspapers. In 1850 the census reported 1,597 political newspapers. Of these 855 were Whig. In every state there were one or two who, because of location at the capital or some large town, or because of precedence or an able editor, were regarded as state "organs" or bellwethers for the rest to follow. There is an amazing similarity of view and expression found among the Know-Nothing newspapers in each separate state.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix.

The *American Organ* was officially established by the party at the national capital in order to provide a national oracle. Started on November 13, 1854, it was published weekly and daily until after the election of 1856, when it became a weekly only. The first editor was Vespasian Ellis, who during his early life had been a resident of Virginia. Moving to Missouri he served as editor of the St. Louis *Democrat* from 1840 to 1844, when he rejoined the Whigs and was given a diplomatic post in Venezuela. He had long been nativistic, having been president of the Missouri Native American Association in 1841. Ellis was very pronounced in his proslavery expressions, although at the same time he professed national views. About a month before the National Council met in June, 1855, at Philadelphia, Ellis incorporated his opinions on the need of nationalism in the new party in an editorial which was in a sense an ultimatum on policy to the party.

As a result of Ellis' disapproval of the twelfth section of the new platform, William M. Burwell of Virginia became editor. Burwell remained until October 29, 1855, when he affiliated with the Democrats because he felt that the slavery question was not one which could be ignored.<sup>2</sup>

The circulation of the *Daily American Organ* was largely confined to Washington, Alexandria, Georgetown, Fredericksburg, Richmond, Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Baltimore.

The weekly paper, which was intended to supply ammunition to the editors all over the United States, and particularly the South, cost two dollars a year. The *American Organ* maintained agents, some of whom were traveling agents, in fifteen states, including North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Arkansas, Kentucky, Georgia, and Louisiana. Its prospectus stated, "The perpetuation of American Freedom is our object; American Rights our motto; and the American Party our cognomen," and that it was published by "an Association of Native Americans." The *Organ* was filled with the usual regular nativistic articles directed against foreign immigrants, the evils and dangers of foreign Ca-

<sup>2</sup> This account is based upon a defense of his record as written by himself in reply to a charge of inconsistency levied by the Richmond *Examiner*, Washington *Weekly American Organ*, November 13, 1854. Cf. also Washington *Weekly American Organ*, May 10, October 29, 1855.

tholicism's temporal designs, and the necessity for freedom of religious conscience.

Personal abuse was not unusual during the period. The editor of the Abingdon, Virginia, *Democrat* denounced a rival editor, saying, "The miserable scoundrel who conducts this sheet is incapable of provoking our resentment. We would as soon think of descending to a contest with a turkey buzzard or a pole cat." The Little Rock *True Democrat* wrote of the Americans as "that contemptible oath bound, demagogic, principle sacrificing, midnight conspiring order, formed against the Constitution of the United States, and against all men that desire to be free." Sam Houston labeled the Galveston, Texas, *News* as "a filthy lying sheet whose editor had done everything mean and contemptible, excepting stealing, and would have done that except he lacked moral courage."<sup>3</sup> Few editors indulged in such coarse abuse as that which Parson William G. Brownlow used to revile his enemies. Rival editors had tough skins but, though threats were often made, rarely resorted to physical violence. Exceptions may be seen when two rival Kentucky editors caned each other in 1857 and when in July of the same year George D. Prentice, the editor of the Louisville *Journal*, and R. T. Durrett, editor of the *Courier*, fought on the street with pistols, wounding three bystanders.<sup>4</sup> Rivals for political office sometimes lost their tempers when they indulged in personalities either on the platform or in print. Such quarrels were seized upon and reported by their respective party sheets.

During the presidential election of 1856 in Georgia, Benjamin Hill refused to be quiescent under the coarse language and insinuations of Alexander Stephens and gave him back more than he sent. Stephens lost his temper, demanded an apology, and challenged. Hill laughed at him and told him that if he lived in no glass house no stone could touch him, but if he did he should restrain himself. Hill wrote Stephens: "Instead of discussing the principles advocated by the American party, have you not for the past eighteen months been abusing the members of that party as 'midnight conspirators,' 'treason plotters,' 'French Jacobins,' etc.? Have you not

<sup>3</sup> Galveston *Weekly News*, October 4, 1856.

<sup>4</sup> Frankfort *Commonwealth*, April 28, May 5, 1857; Augusta *Weekly Chronicle and Sentinel*, July 28, 1857.

compared them to everything monstrous among men, beasts or insects? Have you not searched the whole field of ridicule from 'Doodle-holes,' 'Bear Fights,' with which to engender prejudice against this party? Did you not at Lexington call them the allies of the Abolitionist Lane, who has never acted with them . . . ?"

In a public letter reviewing his position a month later he wrote:

I say to Mr. Stephens, that while I do know his faults, I am willing to regard them with much allowance and not talk about them as much as he supposes; because I honestly believe the man has perverted, distorted, and misrepresented until he cannot help it. It is necessary for his comfort. He is a monomaniac on the subject of falsehood. . . . I regard duelling as no evidence of courage, no vindication of truth, and no test of the character of a "true gentleman." I shall be "braggart," "liar," and "poltroon" enough now and forever, to declare that what the laws of God and my native State unite in denouncing as murder could give me no satisfaction to do, to attempt or to desire.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the newspapers of Alabama, as in other Southern states, had a small circulation and could be purchased lock, stock, and barrel for a few thousand dollars or even less. There were many which were published only a brief time and occasionally the political complexion of the paper changed with the sale of the paper. One such incident is recorded in a letter written by Matthew C. Galloway, editor of the Cahaba *Dallas Gazette*, who wrote his friend, G. S. Houston:

Well, Houston I have at last sold the Gazette, I have been anxious for some time to dispose of it for the purpose of winding up my business. The Know Nothings knew this, and on Saturday last offered me my price, told me, that we would close the matter on Monday, when they would take charge of the paper. The anti-Know Nothings heard of this, and determined to head them—Henry D. Smith, Jas. H. Weakly, John Simpson, James D. Weakly, John S. Kennedy, and R. W. Walker, stepped into my office just before the other side got

<sup>5</sup> Augusta *Weekly Chronicle and Sentinel*, December 23, 1856; Hill, *Senator Benjamin H. Hill of Georgia, His Life, Speeches and Writings*, 22-24.

their note ready and gave me a note for \$2000 for the office. They used every argument offered every inducement for me to stay, but I knew I never would find another such favorable opportunity to sell—and was determined to avail myself of the opportunity—By the terms of sale I agree to remain in the office until the August election, or until they get a new editor. Do you know of a sprightly young man, who desires to engage in the business—The company will dispose of the office on the most favorable terms—I am anxious to get Dalton in the place—The K. N. are sadly disappointed, very hostile because they were foiled—say they will have an office here next week or the week after.<sup>6</sup>

The Arkansas party labored under a disadvantage that was not the usual case with the Southern Americans. They were several times outnumbered in party organs. On July 24, 1855, the Democratic *True Democrat* boasted that there were eleven Democratic sheets in the state to the American's four. This paper also had the largest circulation in the state—some two thousand. The *True Democrat* was of the very few that used political cartoons, publishing two during the campaign of 1856. In such a sparsely settled state as Arkansas, and with her poor communications, newspapers were necessary to the conduct of a successful campaign. As in Arkansas, there were very few editorial advocates in Florida and South Carolina, although in the latter, some support came from former Whig adherents and such Democratic papers as the *Orangeburg Southern*, *Newberry Mirror*, *Newberry Flag*, *Sumperville Times*, and the *Pee Dee Times*, who refused to support Buchanan.

Georgia Americans were perhaps more fortunate in the number and quality of their papers than the Democrats.<sup>7</sup> The Whig presses had outnumbered those of the Democrats, and the majority of these became American advocates. The census of 1850 lists fifty-one papers, daily, weekly, and tri-weekly. This census list is not an accurate indication of the number of Georgia papers, as many were ephemeral, coming and going, changing owners, names, and allegiance with great nonchalance.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew G. Galloway to George Smith Houston, June 18, 1855, G. S. Houston Papers.

<sup>7</sup> Irons, "The Secession Movement in Georgia," 12.



The Louisville *Courier* claimed thirty nativistic Kentucky newspapers in 1855, while assigning only eighteen to the Democrats. Three others were neutral sheets. Some of the American advocates such as the Paducah *Pennant*, and the Elizabethtown *Intelligencer*, previously the *Kentucky Register*, had been Democratic. Democratic editors in 1856 began to boast that the Democratic papers were financially stronger because of more support. They claimed that both major parties had nineteen supporters with the Whigs and Independents having control of three.

The new party in Louisiana, Maryland, and Missouri found able and well-dispersed editorial advocates especially in the thickly populated centers. In Baltimore and New Orleans particularly, the advocates were markedly partisan in their editorializing and news selections. In St. Louis the opposite was true. Missouri, except for a few small-town sheets such as the Hannibal *Weekly True American* and the ephemeral St. Louis *True Shepherd of the Valley* and St. Louis *Know Nothing*, evidenced little of such bitterness or extreme advocacy of nativism. Here the American party, profiting by the accession, after marked hesitancy, of much of the former Whig press in the spring of 1856, had 26 newspapers adhering to their cause, while several were neutral and 12 Democratic. The St. Louis *Evening News and Sentinel* and the St. Louis *Weekly True Shepherd and Cascade*, both advocating temperance principles in addition to espousing Americanism, claimed a circulation of 10,000. Since the *Cascade* shortly before merging into the new title had claimed only 1,600 subscribers, a circulation of 10,000 does not seem reasonable.

Until the early summer of 1855 no American paper was the official organ of the party in Mississippi. All professed to be outsiders looking on and rendering favorable criticism. The *Hinds County Gazette*, for example, would publish such indirect articles as, " 'Sam' that ubiquitous unknown, whose voice is never heard until his blows are felt, must be somewhere in North Mississippi," as frequent meetings "are held endorsing Senator Adams" and his efforts to extend the naturalization laws. News of the party was gathered indirectly from other papers. Those of Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana were given as sources of information about Mississippi news. The Memphis *Eagle*, for example, was the

authority for the statement that in Tippah County there were 2,400 Know-Nothings enrolled out of a voting population of 2,600, and that at a Democratic convention there were no nominations made because a majority of the Democratic delegates were Americans.<sup>8</sup>

Gradually the newspapers throughout the state openly announced their allegiance. Most of the Whig organs and a few of the Democratic papers did so. One such shift resulted in the welcomed accession of E. Jones, editor of the Jackson *Southern Mercury*, a strong State-Rights paper. Jones had been a wheel horse in the Democratic Party, having previously been editor of two other Democratic papers, the Vicksburg *Sentinel* and the *Mississippian*.<sup>9</sup>

The Ripley *Advertiser*, Oxford *Flag*, and the Kosciusko *Southern Sun* used cartoons as an innovation to Mississippi journalism. Only very rarely did illustrations of any kind, except for small cuts in advertisements, appear in the Southern press, and then they had a distinctly "homemade" appearance. The Kosciusko *Southern Sun* pictured "Sam" before the election, the center of the attention of the "ladies," as a handsome young bachelor. Afterwards, "Sam" was pictured alone and exposed by defeat, ugly, with a visage marked by horror, amazement, and malice. The Reverend W. H. Holcombe, a Baptist minister and American candidate for the state legislature, drew the particular ire of his opponents. He was caricatured in a woodcut entitled "Peter Feeding the Coon" as Saint Peter holding up a hungry coon with a dead frog lying on a stump. Biblical citations were added.<sup>10</sup>

Another cartoon depicted a prize fight between William S. Barry, Democratic candidate for Congress and Senator Stephen A. Adams, with Adams emerging with blackened "peepers." One showed "Hezeron Johnson, the Union Bank Holder" in a soliloquy revealing that his hopes of having the bonds paid depended upon enticing "anti-bond Paying Democrats into this Whig trick." Similarly Fillmore in a soliloquy is made to say that if he can only get office again the Democrats can howl all they care to

<sup>8</sup> Woodville (Mississippi) *Wilkinson Whig*, April 15, 1855.

<sup>9</sup> Raymond (Mississippi) *Hinds County Gazette*, May 30, 1855.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, July 25, 1855, protesting the appearance of the cartoons in the Ripley *Advertiser*.

over his instructions to the Cuban government to murder Crittenden and his men. Others pictured Harriet Beecher Stowe fattening a baby to offer as a sacrifice to the Know-Nothings. The most effective cartoon was perhaps one entitled "Jim Presley, the 'Model Telegrapher' on the Stump," with an attack on the Americans in a jumbled up, misspelled speech.<sup>11</sup>

Know-Nothingism in North Carolina was very fortunate in the number of newspapers advocating its cause. The *Register* boasted that in the campaign of 1856 twenty-two of the state's thirty-seven papers favored Fillmore, with one neutral. The complete list of papers supporting the party between 1854 and 1858 would contain more titles than the above statement because there were losses and gains each year. To give the complete story for each paper would be somewhat difficult, since changes were numerous. The Greensboro *Patriot* united in 1854 with the *Yadkin Flag* to become the *Patriot and Flag*. In 1859 it was enlarged and resumed its name of *Patriot*, and for three months during 1860 it published a supplementary edition called the *Little Add*. The Raleigh *Statesman*, established in 1854, lasted only two weeks. The correct way to establish a newspaper seemed to be to start a quarrel with a rival editor and thus find material to fill column after column with abuse and contradiction. Columns also were thrown open for local aspirants to launch forth with long letters and communications about politics.

Politics was the lifeblood of all except the neutral, religious, or temperance papers, such as the *Spirit of the Age*, which had the largest circulation in the state. Even the larger newspapers of North Carolina had small capital investments. It was stated in 1849 that the profits from a single newspaper like the New York *Herald* would purchase every paper in the state. The prominent Raleigh *Register* sold at auction in 1856 for \$5,100.

Each editor was keenly alert for weaknesses of his opponents. For this reason the *North Carolina Weekly Standard* as the principal opposition organ furnishes an excellent source for studying the American Party. Paced by the powerful and brilliant editor, W. W. Holden, it can largely be credited with checking the

<sup>11</sup> Kosciusko (Mississippi) *Southern Sun*, November 10, 1854; March 17, 1855; March 3, 1855; March 10, 1855; September 19, 1854; May 13, 1854.

growth of the party in his state. Though originally a Whig, Holden early switched to the vigorous Democratic Party to become its wisest mentor in the state.<sup>12</sup> Though he largely abstained from the invectives and causticisms that were so common, he could on occasion deal telling and skillful blows. His paper at times blossomed into a daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly with various combinations at the same time. Holden stated that in 1844 no North Carolina paper had a circulation of 1,500, but that in 1854 there were several whose circulation numbered in the thousands. He counted five power presses and fifty newspapers in the state and with evident pride boasted of the 3,000 circulation of his own sheet.

According to C. C. Norton<sup>13</sup> the newspapers of western North Carolina were inferior in number and quality to those of eastern North Carolina. The *Asheville News*, edited by a Methodist preacher, Marcus Erwin, was the sole Democratic paper in the extreme western part of the state.

The Americans of Tennessee possessed perhaps the most colorful and influential editor in all the South in the person of Parson William G. Brownlow, publisher of the Knoxville *True Whig*. Brownlow claimed his paper had 14,000 subscribers when the war broke out.<sup>14</sup> E. Merton Coulter states that his circulation of 10,700 was the largest in the South and brought him an income of \$10,000 a year. This, for the period and for the South, was an enormous circulation, enabling Brownlow to exert a powerful influence. Published in a town with only 3,000 population, the *True Whig's* circulation was distributed throughout other parts of the South and adjacent West. His endorsement of the party gave it valuable impetus in its initial stages as "with most of these readers the paper was not an organ, but an oracle, and they followed its teaching with unquestioned faith."<sup>15</sup>

Loving name calling and the use of italics, with various sizes of bold face capitals, Brownlow, whom Andrew Johnson claimed to

<sup>12</sup> He summarized his own career, *Raleigh Weekly North Carolina Standard*, June 28, 1854.

<sup>13</sup> Clarence Clifford Norton, "The Democratic Party in Ante-Bellum North Carolina 1835-1861," in James Sprunt *Historical Studies*, XXI (1930), 353.

<sup>14</sup> Queener, "William G. Brownlow as an Editor," *loc. cit.*; Coulter, *William G. Brownlow, Fighting Parson of the Southern Highlands*, 50.

<sup>15</sup> Temple, *Notable Men of Tennessee*, 47.

be the true head of the party in the state, went further than mild adjectives when upbraiding rival editors in the press or from a political platform. In referring to the editor of the Democratic Nashville *Daily Union and American* he said:

. . . and who is E. G. Eastman? He is a dirty lying and unscrupulous Abolitionist, from Massachusetts who once conducted an abolitionist paper. . . . He edits a dirty scurrilous sheet; and like his master Governor Johnson, never could elevate himself above the level of a common blackguard. No epithet is too low, too degrading or disgraceful to be applied to the members of the American Party, by either of these Billingsgate graduates.

Decent men shun coming in contact with either of them, as they would avoid a night cart, or other vehicle of filth. As some fish thrive only in dirty water, so the *Nashville Union and American* would not exist a week out of the atmosphere of slander and vituperation. A fit organ, this, for all who arrange themselves under the dark piratical flag of Andrew Johnson and his progressive Democracy.<sup>16</sup>

Texas Americans were particularly successful in gaining accessions from Democratic newspaper ranks. When J. S. Ford, Democratic State Chairman and editor of the Austin *Texas State Times*, gave his adherence to the new party, it gained in prestige. Another important Democratic paper in Austin, the *Texas State Gazette*, likewise changed its allegiance until its editor, Williamson S. Oldham, withdrew from the order. Other Democratic editors followed the lead of Ford; the *LaGrange Paper*, *Bastrop Advertiser*, *Austin Confederate*, *San Antonio Sentinel*, and the *Henderson Star Spangled Banner*, all became converts to the American cause. In 1856 the *Jefferson Herald* also abandoned the Democrats.

With successes of the party in Virginia, more and more newspapers supported the new movement. By "support" it must not be understood to imply that they necessarily approved all the features of the party or were even outright members of the party. One of the peculiar features of the Know-Nothing Party in Virginia was the participation of thousands in its activities who were never formally initiated.

<sup>16</sup> Brownlow, *Americanism Contrasted*, 187.

In an age when amusement opportunities were limited, lodges, barbecues, political meetings, parades, and newspaper squabbings took on a much more inviting prospect. The founders of the American Party, realizing this, planned to capitalize on the novelty of their new type of lodge and political party combined. The peculiar and unusual features of the order were relied upon to carry the party through its infancy and allow it to emerge rapidly as a full-fledged and powerful political force.

The mystery attached to the solemn ritual, whose secrecy was closely guarded during the early stages, worked as an invisible magnet to pull new members into the order. Ulysses S. Grant, for example, wrote years later that he had joined the party because he wanted to see what went on in the meetings.<sup>17</sup> It would be a misjudgment to consider ritualistic secrecy as the main attraction. However, the tendencies which caused Americans to join numerous fraternal associations such as the Masons, Odd Fellows, or the Improved Order of Red Men swayed many of those who wavered over party principles and allegiance.

In order to confuse, and to tantalize, those American Party papers which were in on the "know" pretended to be in great doubt as to what was going on. They published all sorts of skits, squibs, and farcical articles. Somewhat lengthy extracts from these will be quoted in the belief that the peculiar "flavor" of their expression would be lost in condensation. The word most frequently used in this mystifying process was "Sam." In fact, "Sam" was the favorite term employed as the cognomen of the party by its adherents before its true name was revealed. To the "questions" as to Sam's identity, the following description taken from a public letter written by Kenneth Rayner was widely published:

There is a certain personage abroad in the land, at the sound of whose voice the shackles of party drop from the hands of our people, like those of Paul and Silas at the approach of the angel. . . . Although the echo of his footsteps is not heard, yet, to the demagogue and the party hack, he is as terrible as an "army with banners." He is no magician, and yet the touch of his wand, like that of the spear of Ithuriel, causes the mask to drop from the face of hypocrisy, and exposes selfishness

<sup>17</sup> Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860*, 398n.

and partisan bigotry in all their deformity. He comes with his "fan in his hand, and he purges his floor" as he goes. They call him "Sam." But it is not "Uncle Sam". . . . His march is ever onward. He passes rivers at a bound, scales mountains at a leap, and through swamp and forest he never loses his way. He never stops, except to drop a tear upon the grave of some revolutionary hero, for his heart is as tender, as his nerves are strong. He watches around our dwellings when we are asleep, and slumber never weighs heavy on his eyelids. He carries in his hand the flag of his country, which had so often withstood the battle and the breeze. The halo of freedom beams upon his countenance, and enemies of the Union fly at his coming, like kites and cows at the eagle's swoop. He never strikes without warning, but when he does, the edge of his claymore severs joints and marrow, and a hecatomb falls at every blow. The creed of his faith is the constitution of his country, and Luther and Washington are his two great exemplars of religious liberty and civil freedom. Bars and bolts cannot screen the chicanery of midnight caucuses from his ken, and convent walls cannot be built too high for him to scale.<sup>18</sup>

#### A Maryland speaker pictured "Sam" as:

That noble and mysterious personage Sam, with sound head and pure heart—coming up from the fires of the Revolution, shaking his hoary locks of wisdom, and cleaving to the doctrine of our fathers—is seated upon his war horse and with sword in hand, is flying over the plains of this new world, bearing down all opposition with a purpose as firm as the eternal granite that supports the earth, "that Americans shall rule America." But who is Sam?

Sam, sir, is the embodiment of liberty. He has the soul of a lion, and carries the American Republic in that soul. When he speaks he is heard, possessing great logic, set on fire by the elements and torch of freedom. His words burn the demagogue, and lash the black heart of political corruption like the sting of an adder. He has wounded both the old parties, and left an eating ulcer in the wound that breeds death; but he has established another, a national, an American Party, that will live forever. Ordinarily his mind glides along in

<sup>18</sup> Richmond *Daily Penny Post*, February 17, 1855.

limpid and growing abundance, flowing up from the dear sparkling current of his unadulterated patriotism, an image far more lovely than a sleeping Venus: I mean Sam's own bride, the goddess of American Liberty.<sup>19</sup>

Another description ran:

This is certainly the most mysterious individual of whom history makes mention. Like the wind, we hear the sound of his approach, but no man can tell whence he cometh nor whither he goeth. In imitation, it seems of "Jack the Giant-killer," he appears to be perambulating the whole country, enveloped in his "coat of darkness," and rejoicing in his "shoon of swiftness." To use the pompous phrase of Sam Johnson, he is "endued with the immunities of invisibility" to a degree which is quite astounding. His progress is so rapid, that it leaves the wondering telegraph far behind. He seems indeed to be omnipresent—to pervade all space—to embrace both ends of the continent, and all the intermediate space, at one and the same time. Who and what he is, it seems impossible to know. It is easier to find out the author of Junius, or to discover the mouth of the Niger, or to ascertain, with historical accuracy, "who hit Billy Patterson," or to explain the whereabouts of Milly McPherson. The shadows of thirty centuries have been purged from the land of Egypt, and the treasures of her hieroglyphics stand revealed. The History of Nineveh and Babylon is becoming as familiar as the Annals of the United States. But where is the man that can tell us anything about "Sam?" Sometimes we are almost tempted to conclude as Byron did with regard to the author of Junius, that "he is nobody at all." But his acts are so palpable, that there can be no doubt upon the subject. At one moment we hear of him in Pennsylvania; the next he had beat the telegraph, and is turning the whole world upside down in Massachusetts.—Scarcely has the roar of the guns announcing his triumph died away, when he is in Kansas, the very hot bed of abolitionism, teaching those hard headed colonists of Greeley and the Union haters, that "some things can be done as well as others." His latest demonstration has been made in the Congress of the United States itself. Yes, the very Sebastopol of old fogyism is

<sup>19</sup> Abingdon *Virginian*, February 23, 1856.



beleagured, and though it offers a stout resistance, it is evident that the assaults of its terrible enemy are telling.<sup>20</sup>

In Georgetown, District of Columbia, a debate occurred between a Catholic priest, Father Barnard Maguire, and a Methodist minister, a Reverend Mr. Brooks, who denied that he "knew Sam" but felt that he knew his history. "Sam," he said:

was born in the garden of Eden; when the world was deluged he rode out of the flood with Noah in the ark; he was present at the building of the tower of Babel; he wandered with the children of Israel in the wilderness; he was with Miriam in the inspired song and dance; he blew the loudest ram's horn trumpet when the walls of Jericho fell; he clothed John the Baptist; and was with him on the banks of the river; he held up the chains of Paul when he reasoned of righteousness and judgment to come before Agrippa.

He had a hard time with the Popes and the Inquisition, but it was he who pointed the young Luther to the dust covered Bible on the neglected shelves of the old monastery. He brought that Bible with him across the ocean in the Mayflower; he laid the cornerstone of the first Protestant church in the Colonies; and it was he who first stirred up the old and the young, the rich and the poor, high and low in the oppressed colonies so that even the mountain boys knew that "Sam" was about.<sup>21</sup>

The following "Reward Notice" gave another fanciful description:

**\$100 REWARD:** The subscribers will pay the above reward for the capture of the fellow called "Sam". It has been ascertained that "Sam" has been prowling about in these parts for some time past, as many persons declare they have seen him, but when asked about him they always answer, they "don't know". "Sam is supposed to be a tall American whose forefathers fought in the battles of the Republic, and came to this country many years before," as Mrs. Partington says, "to worship God and cheat the Indians according to the

<sup>20</sup> Raleigh *Weekly Register*, December 20, 1856.

<sup>21</sup> Austin *Texas State Times*, March 3, 1855.

dictates of their own Consciences." He generally wears a home made suit of cloth or cassinet manufactured in this country, and always contends strenuously that he has right to read the Bible as much as he pleases—also that this is the greatest nation in the world, and owes no allegiance whatever to the Pope—all of which is nonsense, but the fellow will talk that way. The subscribers are determined to hunt Sam out, therefore they offer the above reward, which they guarantee will be paid in (broken) bank notes so soon as said "Sam" is delivered to them.<sup>22</sup>

In attempting to popularize the party various curious devices were resorted to. It was asserted that a "close observer" had discovered the secret sign by which one Know-Nothing recognized another. One eye was closed, the thumb and forefinger formed into an "O" in which he placed his nose. The interpretation of this being

Eye . . . . .	Nose . . . . .	O
I . . . . .	Knows . . . . .	Nothing! <sup>23</sup>

A story originating in the *Louisville Courier* told of a ruffian, six feet, two inches in height, who insulted a young girl on the "cars." As six or seven "roughnecks" sided with him the conductor was helpless. At the next station the conductor called out something, "probably the word 'Shanghai,'" and a crowd immediately beat up the bully and his friends. The moral, of course, was carefully pointed out: "although it was very mysterious as to how the ruffians got their justice, it might be that the Know Nothings were working again."

A Missouri editor announced that "the insignia of the Know-Nothings has at last been discovered. It consists of the American Eagle holding in his bill a furriner; by the seat of his breeches." A Georgia paper inquired: "Who was the first Know-Nothing?" The answer—"Socrates, who, when declared the wisest of men by the oracle at Delphis [*sic*] answered that he was wise enough to 'know that he knew nothing.'"<sup>24</sup>

The *Natchez Courier* asserted that in Bayou Sara, Louisiana,

<sup>22</sup> Richmond *Daily Penny Post*, March 6, 1855.

<sup>23</sup> Fort Adams (Mississippi) *Item*, September 16, 1854.

<sup>24</sup> Huntsville *Independent Missourian*, March 1, 1855.

**"SAM!"**  
**Before the Election!**



**"SAM!"**  
**After the Election.**





the Know-Nothings were so hot on the heels of the foreigners that in playing pool the players refused to put any "English" on the ball, drink Irish whisky in punch, or drink punch from a bowl with a German-silver ladle.<sup>25</sup> The editor of the *Nashville Gazette* was accredited with picking up the following "in his travels around town,"

U. O. I. Forti Dollrs.  
 Little Dorg with brindle man  
 Watch!! — Your eyes —  
 stump tailed T I M E  
 Coming—Do you — YES WE—  
 dont KNOW NOTHING <sup>26</sup>

Numerous space fillers or squibs were inserted in odd spaces in newspaper columns. The following are typical: "Why is Virginia like a lunatic Asylum?—because it contains more Know Nothings than Wise Men." "It is reported that certain countrymen are afraid to eat beef for fear that they might get a piece of the Pope's Bull." "Sam is certainly coming this way. He was in Manchester Saturday. Nobody knew what he came for, but we think we can guess. There was an election there that day."

M. L. Cook, a large planter of Hinds County, Mississippi, was successfully experimenting with a new variety of cotton. This he named "Know Nothing Cotton." A newspaper skit announced a sheriff's sale with "Sam" offering to sell a cider barrel, log cabins, old Democratic platforms, and claims of Free-Soilers on all United States property. The Fort Adams, Mississippi, *Item* started a series of articles modeled on Biblical style after the example of the *Baltimore Clipper*. One verse of "The Book of Know-Nothingism" ran: "So also in the days of Frank, whose surname was Pierce, it came to pass that the Pope and Spoils Party laid their heads together and formed a most grievous plot, but the everlasting Yankee Nation, being a shrewd, cunning people and full of notions, guessed out their plot and prevented it."

The familiar purported comment of Washington, "Put none but Americans on guard tonight," was seen everywhere.

Another favorite was: " 'The Know Nothing!' is a name of a

<sup>25</sup> Natchez *Daily Courier*, October 28, 1854.

<sup>26</sup> Fort Adams (Mississippi) *Item*, October 7, 1854.

new book that has just been published. It is a story without a preface, introduction, table of contents, page or chapter headings, or anything to indicate its character, or subject, except the ominous 'Know Nothing.' Large editions, one after another, will probably disappear without anybody's knowledge."

There was such a book published. It conformed to this advance notice as to format and even to context. It was a somewhat sentimental novel characteristic of the time, with little nativism in it, defending the Know-Nothings and secret societies.<sup>27</sup>

A notice of the "Dreadful Malady" was copied by numerous Southern editors: "Dreadful Malady.—A new disorder called Know-nothingism has recently appeared in the North, and is rapidly spreading over the length and breadth of this vast continent. Its origin is not precisely known; but is supposed to have engendered in the foulness and corruptions of party politicians. Political doctors stand aghast; not knowing where the next blow may fall, or the remedy."

The "Know Nothing Head Dress" skit also went the rounds of the country presses. This article purported to describe a new style of ladies' hats of a "peculiar mode and striking character" that was appearing on the streets of the eastern cities. This was said to be composed of a sort of wreath interwoven with ribbons of many colors with floating ribbon streamers. Called the "Know Nothing Wreath" this bonnet, like everything else about Know-Nothingism was "startling and un-expected."

American newspapers delighted in mock exposés and fallacious, misleading revelations of Know-Nothing mysteries. An example, "The Do-Knothings," appeared in Democratic papers as well as in American journals:

The Do-Knothings: A meeting of this society was held yesterday evening. Tom Lazybones took the chair. Bill Loaferson was the Vice-president. Several idle men were present. The Secretary made his report. He observed, that at the last meeting nothing had been done, according to the constitution of the society.

Jim Vacuum offered to make a motion, but did not move

<sup>27</sup> Anonymous, *The Know Nothing?* (Boston, 1855), *passim*; Hannibal (Missouri) *True American*, March 29, 1855.

from his seat. He observed that it was a popular prejudice that it was the destiny of man to work. The present order had been founded for the encouragement of idleness. A new member was waiting to be initiated. The President said, "Let him come in." The new member was carried in, in a four-post bedstead, after giving the password, *Ex Nihilo nihil fit*. The President administered the oath of eternal laziness, and desired the candidate for admission into the order to repeat it after him. The candidate waited till the President had finished, and then said, "Ditto."

The Vice-president asked the candidate whether he would take a drink. The candidate nodded and opened his lips. "The Secretary will now read to you the rules of the Society," said the President. The candidate shut his eyes and fell asleep in an instant. "He'll do!" said the President approvingly. "Yes," said the Vice-president, "He'll do—nothing." The member's name was enrolled, and he was roused up to pay his subscription.

He did nothing of the kind. Nothing else took place. Nothing more was said. Nothing was done. We know nothing more. The whole thing amounts to nothings.<sup>28</sup>

After giving an account of a "false" exposure in Boston of the American Party's ritual, one editor explained that the correct answer to the familiar query, "Have you seen Sam?" was made by elevating the thumb of the left hand to the top of the nose, placing the thumb of the right hand to the little finger of the left, extending the fingers and working an imaginary cork screw, and at the same time looking as wise and solemn as possible while murmuring "nothing green."<sup>29</sup>

The problem of reporting an American meeting when the reporter was handicapped by "not knowing anything about it" was handled in this way:

Insurrection (?) A Dreadful alarm was created among the citizens of one of the Southside counties last week, by a rumor of *insurrection*. A large and enthusiastic assembly of Know Nothings numbering several hundred, were enjoying

<sup>28</sup> Fayetteville (North Carolina) *Argus*, February 8, 1854; Little Rock *True Democrat*, August 9, 1854.

<sup>29</sup> Richmond *Daily Penny Post*, January 25, 1855.

themselves over a hearty supper, and with great glee, in view of their brilliant prospect in Virginia. The hubbub was considerable, and the Antis who were without the pale, and knew nothing of the existence of the Know Nothings in their midst, could not imagine what was the cause, unless the negroes were concocting schemes for an insurrection. They became dreadfully alarmed, and, seizing their fowling pieces and carving knives, posted themselves behind bulwarks, ready for the attack. The Know Nothings, in blissful ignorance of the alarm they had occasioned, continued to enjoy themselves until a late hour, then quietly dispersed. It is said that the paleness of the outsiders has not disappeared yet, and in consequence of the fact, that they are as much afraid of Know Nothingism as they are of an insurrection.<sup>30</sup>

When the opposition began to fill the press with letters of withdrawal, both real and fictitious, it was noticeable that there was a remarkable similarity in the wording of these withdrawal notices. Know-Nothings retaliated by printing mock Democratic withdrawals such as:

Sinkum Sank 1855 A.D. between the 15 & 10 of the month. Mr. Editor—Nearly six months and a haft of a fortnit since, I was purswayded, by false deception, to jine the so-called Sag Nicht assosiashun up here. Now Ime fully of the opinion that it is a dimmickratick concern, and that I ort to tare the hull kaboogh down, and ile dew it shure, even if I have to pull down the hull dimmikratick party along with it—therefore, plase tell the people in printin, in your next paper, that I have quit the so-called and known Sag Nicht assosiashun forever and Eternally, and in order that my pursishun may be placed rite agin afore the hull world, I wish you to send a koppy of your paper to the prince Albert & his wife, and Lewis Napoleyon and Miss Ujane, & to the Zav of roosha, & lord Ragland at the Krymeer Post offis, & ginerall Konka at Kuba, and to Mister Peerce the so called pres. of this you nighted Straights, and to all the M. Cee's in Kongress and Kabbinett, and to every boddy elsc you can think on, and you may keep won yourself to show people what wants to see my name in print.

<sup>30</sup> Richmond *Daily Penny Post*, January 25, 1855.



P.S. Print my name in big letters and ile pay you for it when I kum in.

Dubble pp.SS. what will you take to print my name in every paper, every time you print. betsy and the children are well and wood like to see this here letter printed. Your Expectant Cervant, Ike Partinton.

ppp.sss. My mother Missis Partinton, is well I thank you. Yours, I.P.<sup>31</sup>

Members at times poked fun at themselves:

Morning Jones: well, we got badly licked yesterday; what the plague could have been the cause of it?

Dont Know.

I hope you didn't vote against us did you?

Dont Know.

What! don't know how you voted?

Dont Know.

Morning friend Smith, fine morning.

Dont Know.

The D— you dont, do you not know that this is a very fine, pleasant morning—a glorious morning?

Dont Know.

Why bless me, are you one of the Know-Nothings too?

Dont Know.

You dont know—well, what the h— do you know?

Dont Know.

In a farcical article to make "clear" the real name of the party, a writer stated that he had learned from a "book just published" that its real name was Babelorium, from the tower of Babel. The three degrees of the Order were Mumsome, Mummore, and Mummost. The local groups were called toweretts. The initiation was described as being conducted by officers "dressed in revolutionary and Indian costumes." The account continues:

The candidate is hoodwinked and a string tied around his tongue. After certain questions are asked and answers returned, the conductor withdraws the fools cap from the eyes

<sup>31</sup> Woodville (Mississippi) *Wilkinson Whig*, July 14, 1855.

of the candidate; the usher seizes him from behind by the coat collar with both hands and pulls back as if determined to cause strangulation; the wampum master in front draws on the cord tied to the candidate's tongue; and the captain mum stands a little on the left with an upraised tomahawk.

The candidate with lolling tongue, choking throat and distended eyes gazes round and in addition to figures directly before him is struck with ludicrous yet painful amazement on beholding the room filled about him with the most indescribable images. Every man in the assembly has on a fools cap coming down over the eye brows and tapering back at an angle of 45 degrees, about 18 inches in length. Every man has the forefinger of each hand in his mouth and with a broad grin on his face tugs on the corners of his potato trap to see which can produce the most horrible grimace, and the deepest guttural cavern, studded with the longest rows of bad ivory.

*Oath*—the candidate then proceeds to make oath to a string of the most absurd attempts at fun that we have ever seen. one clause is sufficient;

“To the true and faithful performance of all which I pledge my most pertinacious logos, binding myself under a penalty no less than having my boots drawn off over my head, my hair twisted into a cord nine feet long, the skirts of my coat cut into forty nine strips and in this unfortunate plight suffer myself to be rode on a three cornered rail nine feet long over the railroad track of a hamburg rocket at the rate of ninety miles per hour.” <sup>32</sup>

The Democrats in the same spirit occasionally fought back with similar weapons. The experience of “Uncle Jake” amused the Democrats and did little harm.

## A NIGHT WITH THE KNOWNOTHINGS—OR UNCLE JAKE'S EXPERIENCE, By his Nephew

Thar never was a better dimicrat than Uncle Jake Rodgers on the yearth, allers attendin barbecues and speechifyings every chance, and like the Parson, could give a reason for the faith that was in him—he has allers been looked up to as a sort of oracle in perlitical matters, and noes the histry of the United States Bank and its orful iniquities, the tariff and its oppressors, the distribu-

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, June 24, 1854.

tion of the publick lands and all them measures the old Whigs used to try, to fix on the people so hard. In fact, Uncle Jake was a dimicrat from the top of his hed to the sole of his feet, and from one side to the other, and Aunt Nancy, his wife, was just as ram-bunctious on the subject as himself, only a little more so.

Now Mr. Eastman, I dont like to expose Uncle Jake, but the thing is so good, I'll have to tell you all about it.

Last summer tar cum into, our settlement a nice young man, sent out, as I larnt, from your place to make no-nuthins, but he didn't let us all no what he cum for at fust. Howsomever, he linked in quite a lot on 'em, principally whigs, and I larnt that some on 'em intend trin thar hands on Uncle Jake. Thinks I, old fellers, you'll be barkin' up the rong tree, sortin, but the fust thing I noed they got hold of the old man, treated him, told him that the dimicrats was all jinin' on 'em—that it warn't no whig trick, nothin of that sort—that the Pope of "*roam*" was a cummin' here to use up our Government to make priests of the boys and nuns of all the gals—that the no nothins were going to stop all these evil things—goin' to regenerate the land, and bring things back to the days of Ginerall Jacksson—that Gov Jacksson's folks war all fur 'em, tooth and toe nail, and what with one thing and another the fust thing Uncle Jake noed he was a regular ring-tailed nonuthin. They dun started home, an as he went along his mind was full of misgivins, how could he face the ole 'oman? What would Ginral Jackson say if he was alive? How could he meet his old dimicratic friends again? and suddenly recollected that *The Union*, (the old watchman on the tower of our Perlitical Zion, as he used to call your paper) was opposed to it. All these things begin to work in Jake's mind, till by time he got home he was in a powerful swivet.

He found Aunt Nancy sitting up for him and Unkle Jake, he never was ashamed to meet fore.

"Well Jake," ses she, "what on yearth has kept you out so late to night?" for Uncle Jake was very regular in his habits.

"Why Nancy, i been round—attending a meetin to-nite," ses he, quite hesitating like.

"What kind uva meetin?" ses she.

"Why—a sort uv a perlitical meetin," ses he, shiverin all over, for he was powerful oneasy by this time.

"Well," ses she, "if you've been trying to hed these no-nuthins, I aint got no more to say, for you couldn't be in better business, fur I learn that sum as call themselves dimicrats, have

joined 'em. I don't like em no how, Jake fur they don't cum out open an above borard; but are pokin round at nite in alleys and dark places; but I thank the Lord you aaint wun of 'em, fur I no I couldnt live with one on 'em to save my life. But what makes you look so Jacob! are you sick? Bless my life if you aint got a chill on you and yur hands as cold as ice, Whats the matter, Jake?"

"nunthin much," sez Unkle Jake, "I don't feel very well to-nite, old oman and I'll go to bed," so say'n he slipt into bed and the old woman arter him.

Bimbey Unkle Jake, arter tossin and rolin about, gits to sleep, and drempt that all his dimicrat friends he used to be with so much wouldn't have nuthin to do with him and that he couldn't no longer vote his old ticket, for his old friends and his old principles, and groaned in spirit.

Aunt Nancy waked him up, skeered to deth, and Unkle Jake had to out with the hole thing. Aunt Nancy jumped out uv bed and declared she couldn't stay thar, that a no-nuthin couldn't come nigh her. Unkle Jake at last told her ef she would forgive him he'd go early in the mornin and git out of the thing, she told him no, she couldn't stand him till morning and directly Unkle Jake hauls on his close, and went out and got the president and sum more on 'em together, and swore he must git out afore mornin or kill some body one. They let him out—and when he got loose, he sung, he shouted, he danced and capered like a boy—he run home and like to a squeezed Aunt Nancy to deth; she, good old soul, was mitily riled about it, and powerfully distressed, but sealed his pardon with a kiss of forgiveness, and let by-gones be by-gones.

One man soon arter hinted to Unkle Jake that he heered he was a no-nuthin, when he pitched into the feller and like to a walloped him to deth; since that time nobody has ever accused Unkle Jake of being a no nuthin.<sup>33</sup>

When the steamer "Uncle Sam" ran into the steamer "Switzerland" and sank her in the river near Natchez, Mississippi Democrats found occasion for a farcical exposure of another "Know Nothing Trick." Articles such as the following (copied from the *Nashua New Hampshire Gazette*) tickled the palates of the Democratic readers:

<sup>33</sup> Frankfort *Weekly Kentucky Yeoman*, April 25, 1856.

Brother renegade I greet you—

Joyed I am as much to meet you.  
Now mark my words and their intent,  
And bow your head if you assent.  
Can you on occasion lie?

(Candidate bows.)

Can you all orders blindly follow?  
And have you a capacious swallow?  
Don't you believe the Jesuits thrive  
Because in secret they contrive?  
You hate confessionals?—I see  
You do—but you'll confess to me.  
Don't you believe the Romish priests  
Are sworn to slaughter us like beasts?  
That all the Irish arms are hiding  
In all the shanties they abide in?  
That all the Irish girls combine  
To purchase arsenic and strychnine?  
To fight for the Devil and the Pope? <sup>34</sup>

The Democratic idea of a "Grand Feast" of the nativists ran:

Grand Feast.—"Sam" having determined to commence the millennium, has ordered a grand feast for inaugurating that "good time." He requests us to publish the following as an outline of his bill of fare:

*First course*

Catholic broth ..... Jesuit Soup

*Second course*

Roasted Catholic ..... Boiled Priest

*Third course*

The Pope's big toe, broiled.

*Fourth course*

Fried Nuns, very nice and tender.

*Dessert*

Rich Irish Brogue ..... Sweet German Accent.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Raleigh *North Carolina Weekly Standard*, March 14, 1855.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, May 16, 1855. The "Rich Irish Brogue" and the "Sweet Accent" referred to a speech made by Scott in the campaign of 1852 to a group of foreign voters.

The *North Carolina Weekly Standard* published a cut showing a man smoking a pipe with an old dilapidated hat on his head. Underneath it were the verses:

WHEN THIS OLD HAT WAS NEW  
By Slasher & Co.

When this old hat was new, my boys,  
Not very long ago,  
The Federalists, beaten, began to fear  
A final overthrow.—  
And so to keep their old party up,  
The whole concern fell through,  
Right down in the culverts dark, my boys—  
Since this old hat was new.

When this old hat was new, my boys,  
The Know Nothings first did plan  
To beat the people's party down—  
To this they swore each man:  
They could not trust each other, boys,  
So by a lantern blue,  
They pledged in horrid oaths good faith,  
When this old hat was new.

These Know Nothings drew their forces from  
All sorts of people too;  
The weak, the mean, the good, the bad,  
The owners of slaves and fanatics mad  
Made up their motley crew.  
We met them first in August last,  
When this old hat was new,  
And the way we drubbed them boys, it was  
A handsome sight to view.

But now these Know Nothings say they are  
“*Americans*” all true;  
They've changed their name a dozen times,  
Since this old hat was new.  
But though they now deny their *name*,  
As knaves are wont to do.

Their doctrines look just as they did  
When this old hat was new.

Gilmer and Filmer's now their cry,  
And Donelson's sometimes too:  
But we'll drub them again in August next,  
For our boys are always true.  
When this old hat was new my boys,  
They cursed the Catholics blue:  
But now their candidate sleeps with the Pope,  
As they say he ought to do;  
'Tis very strange how things have changed  
Since this old hat was new!

The *Know Nothing Songster* published in the East did not circulate in the South. Southern Americans had their own rhyme-sters to write political verse to the tune of some well-known melody of the day. "To Fillmore and Donelson" was written by one such, to be sung to the air of "Billy Barlow":

To Fillmore and Donelson every success!  
May they run a *sure race*, the nation to bless.  
Oh strong may they prove, Our dear Union to save!  
And long o'er our lands, may the Stars and  
Stripes wave.<sup>36</sup>

The Richmond *Penny Post* advertised for sale at twenty-five cents each two songs composed and published in sheet-music form. Their titles, indicative of their content, were: "Have You Seen Sam—Fern Leaf Polka" and "Have You Seen Sam?"

In Maryland a "Campaign Ballad and Lyric No. 3" ran:

### A Health to Fillmore

Fill high the cup with ruby wine,  
And pledge a hearty health to him  
Whose name in purest light shall shine,  
Nor slander's breath shall ever dim.  
Fill up! Fill up! the sparkling cup,  
Fillmore! Fillmore!

<sup>36</sup> Milledgeville (Georgia) *Southern Recorder*, September 23, 1856.

He would not do a wrongfull deed,  
Nor scorn a brother's vested right,  
Unknown to him the modern creed  
That loves the black and hates the white,  
Fill up! Fill up! the sparkling cup,  
Fillmore! Fillmore!

He loves his country and his God,  
And rich in honors all unsought,  
Still treads the path our fathers trod,  
And holds in reverence what they taught.  
Fill up! Fill up! the sparkling cup,  
Fillmore! Fillmore!<sup>37</sup>

The exodus in Virginia of a local figure to the Democrats was satirized by accrediting him with the authorship of a song which he had "frequently sung with tears streaming down his face." The verses were:

Ye freemen who cherish the glory,  
And rights by your forefathers won,  
Come list to my tragical story,  
Of Foul deeds by Foreigners done.

These strangers by hundred, and thousand,  
All sought a free home in our land,  
We gave them our rights and protection,  
With a free and hospitable hand.

Like over fed brutes some grew pampered,  
With blessings they ne'er knew before,  
And shipped their false countrymen over,  
To help them rule our shore.

As soon as our land they could tread on,  
They thought it was free e'en for crime,  
And by their ambitious friends led on,  
They strove Freedom's temple to climb.

<sup>37</sup> Richmond *Daily Penny Post*, March 15, 1856; Baltimore *Patriot*, July 20, 1856.



Instead of Liberty's lessons,  
 They studied only of foul deeds,  
 And our hospitals, almshouses, prisons,  
 Were filled with the fruits of such seeds.

By numbers and Irish assurance,  
 Each office was filled by their knaves,  
 Till tyranny past all endurance  
 Bade natives arise or be slaves.

To this they responded with heart free,  
 And formed a Republican band,  
 Called the Native American Party,  
 Resolved by the country to stand.<sup>38</sup>

The foregoing perhaps are but simple things, yet they added to the interest and kindled a desire to be in on what was going on. Naturally such devices were only temporary in nature, but as the author of *The Sons of the Sires* put it, the people were really "tired of hickory poles, pokeberry-stocks, coons and log-cabins, and ready for a new way of doing business."<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Richmond *Daily Penny Post*, May 7, 1855.

<sup>39</sup> [F. R. Anspach], *The Sons of the Sires; A History of the Rise, Progress and Destiny of the American Party, and Its Probable Influence on the Next Presidential Election* (Philadelphia, 1855), 155.

## SOUTHERN AMERICANS AND SLAVERY

SOUTHERNERS OF all parties in the early years of the 1850's were becoming increasingly aware of the inherent danger to slavery arising from the vast tide of foreigners flooding into the United States. Not until the Americans stressed foreignism as being synonymous with Free-Soilism, a cardinal point in their propaganda, did the Southern Democrats in partisan blindness minimize or even deny the obvious danger to the South.

There was little doubt in the minds of the Southern Know-Nothings that the three and a half million Europeans who were pouring into Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois meant ill to the South. Basically antagonistic toward slavery, in favor of personal liberty and small farms, foreigners went into the Democratic or Republican parties in great numbers. Since Southern Democrats were blissfully unaware that the national Democracy would itself in a few years be rent by a slavery schism that would result in a triumph for Lincoln, they were naturally oblivious of danger and impervious to Know-Nothing warnings of abolitionist infiltration into Northern Democracy. In the Northwestern states eighty of the eighty-eight German newspapers openly fought the Kansas-Nebraska Bill as a concession to slavery.<sup>1</sup>

H. W. Miller of Virginia, speaking in North Carolina, pointed out that since 1850 some 450,000 immigrants a year were pouring into the United States, and if the rising tides of immigration were not checked there would be at the end of the decade some five million foreigners settled in the Northern states. Nine tenths, he

<sup>1</sup> Smith, "The Influence of the Foreign Born of the Northwest in the Election of 1860," *loc. cit.*, 198.

warned, would be the most brawling advocates and adherents of the abolitionists and would soon render the South powerless to defend her interests.<sup>2</sup>

A former Democratic governor of Virginia, William Smith, in support of nativistic principles pictured very plainly the dangers to the South that were inherent in immigration. He demonstrated that the South was not losing control of the House of Representatives because her native population was increasingly too slowly, for the South was favored by a twenty-eight to eighteen ratio of native births, but because the North was being populated by foreign immigrants.<sup>3</sup>

The Southern Know-Nothings early and repeatedly pointed out that immigrants would prevent the South from any gain from the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, and that sooner or later foreigners would control the United States and threaten the very existence of slavery. Frequent comparisons were made to show how many states these immigrants could form with populations equal to Arkansas or some other Southern state.

Felix Zollicoffer of Tennessee, answering an invitation to speak at Charleston, Virginia, emphasized this danger. The American Party in Alabama in formal statement reviewed the population of the slave states and compared it with the number of immigrants, announcing: "As southern men, Alabamians, we are now more deeply interested than other people in checking the annual stream of foreign migration to our shores. At this late date it scarcely needs an argument to convince us that the large mass of foreigners coming to this country entertain feeling utterly hostile to the slave institution of the South."<sup>4</sup>

In Mississippi, Giles M. Hillyer, debating John Quitman, contended that seven tenths of the foreigners settled in the North, thus increasing Northern representation and abolitionist votes in that ratio. He predicted that if a civil war arose, this same ratio would meet the South on the field of battle. Quitman declared that slavery had nothing to fear from foreign immigrants as they mostly settled in the North and Northwest. At Georgetown, Mis-

<sup>2</sup> Raleigh *American Signal*, July 9, 1855; Raleigh *Weekly Register*, June 15, 1855.

<sup>3</sup> Richmond *Daily Penny Post*, March 9, June 13, 1855.

<sup>4</sup> Montgomery *Tri-Weekly Mail*, July 29, 1850.

issippi, Hillyer attempted to show the absurdity of Quitman's statement that slavery had nothing to fear from immigrants by demonstrating that there was 1 foreign vote to every 7 or 8 native votes in the North, while in the South there was only 1 foreign vote to 50 native votes; hence, there were 7 votes to be cast for Free-Soilers in the North to 1 vote in the South. He again warned that ultimately these men might have to be met, not only in the halls of Congress, but on the bloody field of battle.<sup>5</sup>

John M. Berrien in an address to the people of Georgia wrote: "Consider also, that these emigrants, shunning the South from unwillingness to compete with slave labor, from their abolition tendencies, in search of kindred spirits, are thus rapidly increasing the majority against you in Congress, at every apportionment, and will, unless checked, in no very great length of time, place the South at the mercy of fanaticism."<sup>6</sup> The *Rome Courier* predicted that: "The annihilation of the foreign element in the population of the country, would deprive the free states of their weight in the scales of political power."

It is a little difficult to understand why the new party did not profit more from the obvious danger such a shift of political power represented to the South. It should have presented a splendid opportunity for them to hammer home successfully the all-potent argument that the National Democrats were "not safe" on slavery. Southern Democratic editors either through blindness or rank partisanship insisted repeatedly that there was no danger to Southern institutions from foreign immigration. According to Frederick L. Olmsted the South Carolinians felt that foreigners settling in the South became strong advocates of slavery. He quoted the *Carolinian*: "No native *even* can exceed, in idolatry to Slavery, the mass of the ignorant foreign-born laborers. Their hatred of the negro is proportionate to the equality of their intellect and character to his: and their regard for Slavery, to their disinclination to compete with him, in a fair field." Olmsted thought that he found a truer picture of actual conditions in the Morehouse *Ad-*

<sup>5</sup> Natchez *Daily Courier*, August 30, 1855; Woodville (Mississippi) *Wilkinson Whig*, October 6, 1855, contended that since some two thirds of northern immigrants were male, abolitionist voting strength was increased more than proportionally.

<sup>6</sup> Greensboro (North Carolina) *Patriot*, October 3, 1855.

*vocate*. This Louisiana paper saw the great mass of foreigners as direct competitors to slave labor, and as they, like all white people, entertained "an utter abhorrence of being put on a level with blacks, whether in the field or in the work-shop," they disliked to compete with slave labor. In corroboration, the *Advocate* wrote: "It is a well known fact that there exists a great antipathy among draymen and rivermen of New Orleans (who are almost to a man foreigners) to the participation of slaves in these branches of industry."<sup>7</sup>

This issue of labor competition between foreigner and slave was interjected in several congressional debates, and debates appeared occasionally in platform and editorial articles.

The *Texas State Times* went so far as to state that Know-Nothingism had its true origin in the banding together of American workingmen (United Order of American Mechanics) to protect themselves from the low wages of competition of immigrants. A Florida newspaper, with little effect, extolled the benefits that would be derived by mechanics and workingmen if immigration were checked and this "endless competition" removed. The Democratic *Floridian and Journal* answered that it was pure sophistry to attempt to get native mechanics alarmed over competition from immigrant labor. The *Floridian* said that the struggle was always between capital and labor, and the more laboring men, the more votes against capital, and reasoned that capital would be glad to see the naturalization period increased to weaken their labor antagonists.

In Kentucky the *Commonwealth* in a long article pointed out that there was a fundamental economic clash between slave labor and free labor which was clearly recognized by the foreign immigrant. The economic clash was not stressed as much as it could have been, probably for fear of antagonizing the poor whites of the state. The Louisville *Journal* said that John Wentworth, a Free-Soil leader in Illinois, had written: "The fact is, if people wish to drive slave labor from free territory they must look to foreign labor as the best means of doing it."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, with Remarks on Their Economy*, 510-11, 590-91.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted by the Frankfort *Commonwealth*, January 13, 1856.

Just how Southerners of the laboring class reacted to Know-Nothingism is difficult to determine. Available evidence shows that they resented foreign competition. For example, tabulation of votes from the wards of Baltimore, inhabited by the laboring men or "mechanics," as they were termed, suggests they were strongly aligned with the Americans. Senator J. A. Pearce of Maryland somewhat disgustedly wrote to R. M. T. Hunter that he had thought about emigrating to a "more southern" state because "the labouring men of our City sustain the KnowNothings because they wish to banish the competition of foreign labourers, So I am told."<sup>9</sup>

When the American Governor Thomas H. Hicks took office in Maryland in 1858 his inaugural address advocated restriction of immigration because it was providing "ruinous competition to native labor."

As Jeremiah Clemens of Alabama pointed out, in a public letter, by the very nature of things a party which relied on foreign voters must soon enunciate foreign principles, and in time advocate measures opposed to slavery. He showed that the laboring man, the hack driver, and the hod carrier had no desire to compete with the foreigner. In the South an Irish chambermaid, he remarked, looked with suspicion and jealousy on the employment of Negro girls in hotels. Clemens maintained that a wise politician would look at this primary economic motive "at the base of society" to find the seed that would control the destiny of the country. He expressed a true appreciation of a primary rule in the control of public opinion, writing that "the harangues of a Demagogue are harmless if there is no prejudice for him to direct." He believed that the feeling against slavery was largely economic and asserted that without the rivalry of slavery, upon which the sustenance of a man's family depended, there would be no danger at all from political preachers and orators in the country.<sup>10</sup>

Senator James Shields of Illinois, at the very inception of the order, argued on the floor of the Senate that if the West were open (the homestead bill) and the unproductive labor drained away from the cities of the East, there would be no reason to sup-

<sup>9</sup> James Alfred Pearce to R. M. T. Hunter, October 17, 1856, in Ambler (ed.), *Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter, 1826-1876*, II, 199.

<sup>10</sup> Austin *Texas State Times*, July 14, 1856.

port the American Party. Evidence of feeling between native and foreign labor also cropped out in a speech made by a Connecticut delegate at the National Council meeting in February of 1856.<sup>11</sup>

On January 4, 1855, Representative A. R. Sollers of Maryland attempted to convince his fellow congressmen that if the abolitionists were endorsing Americanism they were less able and less farseeing than he thought. To him the immigrants were the backbone of the settlement of the West, where they became abolitionists because of the competition of slave labor. A week later Representative L. M. Cox of Kentucky told the House that he could see but one reason why the North should be particularly anxious to check immigration: because such a policy would tend to increase the price of labor by reducing the labor market.<sup>12</sup>

The position of the Northern branches of their parties was one of the most wordy issues that developed between the two antagonists in the South, particularly so in those campaigns for Federal offices. Democratic speakers and editors as usual assumed the aggressive by charging that in the Northern states Americanism was hand in glove in alliance with abolitionism. There was, of course, much truth in such evidence and arguments, although the Republicans denounced Northern Americans as enemies or as lukewarm friends.

Farsighted Northerners with abolitionist leanings could estimate that immigration was swelling the opposition to slavery in Congress by a number of representatives each ten years. Horace Greeley labeled the Know-Nothing movement as "the best defence the Black power can desire, for it will arrest the growth of the North and make Freedom as weak as slavery."<sup>13</sup> The Democratic *Chicago Times* wrote: "The same Democratic principles that make us destroy slavery make us anxious for a healthy Foreign Emigration as the best means of getting rid of it."<sup>14</sup>

The Democrats, in attempting to fasten the stigma of abolitionism on the American Party in the North and thus indict the Southern Americans as their allies, reprinted the platform and principles of a few county meetings in the North and quoted the

<sup>11</sup> *Raleigh Weekly Register*, February 22, 1856.

<sup>12</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., Appendix 72, 82-85.

<sup>13</sup> Woodville (Mississippi) *Wilkinson Whig*, March 31, 1855.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, August 18, 1855.

more radical American papers such as the *Washington American Organ*, the *Boston American Crusader*, and others as proof that the National Know-Nothing Party and therefore the Southern Know-Nothings were proscriptive and antislavery in belief. It was finally claimed that the *National Era*, an abolitionist paper, owned a large part of the stock of the *American Organ*, the national party paper. Henry Wilson and W. H. Seward were held up as examples of men put into office with nativist aid.

Unlike Alabama Democrats, Georgia Democrats made not the slightest concessions in regard to possible dangers from naturalization. Again and again the Georgia Democratic papers insisted that Northern Americans were working hand in glove with the abolitionists and that there were Negro members in most councils. There were, of course, grounds for charging that there was much abolition sentiment among Northern Americans, but truth and falsehoods were indiscriminately mixed. That Seward was a Know-Nothing was erroneously asserted over and over again.<sup>15</sup>

Either through delusion or rabid party blindness, Georgia Democrats defended immigration as not harmful but even as helpful to the Southern cause. The editor of the *Constitutionalist and Republican* advanced the argument that since immigrants were ignorant paupers their settlement in the North made the North weaker and the South stronger! Anyway, he said, immigration was purely a local problem. Alexander Stephens in his race for Congress, ardent as he was for Southern rights, vigorously denied that foreigners who came to this country joined the abolitionists in their crusades upon the South. It was not so, he said, for he knew it was not so. These settled, he continued, in the Northwestern states such as Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa where were the firmest friends of the South! Democratic leaders advocated that the South should stop wasting time on the "Know Nothing Mummery" and rally to the one safe national party—the Democrats.

W. L. Yancey of Alabama in a Columbus speech stated that he had held himself aloof from political parties for several years because they all were antagonistic to Southern interests. Now he

<sup>15</sup> T. K. Lothrop, *William Henry Seward* (New York, 1897), 145-61, shows the bitter hatred of Seward by the Americans of Massachusetts.



felt that he must recommit himself to the only party that partially offered to support Southern interests. The American Party had demonstrated to him that it had dyed its garments red with the blood of the friends of the South. The Philadelphia platform he disliked because it treated slavery only as an incidental matter and was phrased in such a mild way that conscientious Northern men could endorse it without violating their anti-state-rights principles. To him this platform was antislavery and therefore destroyed the nationality of the party.<sup>16</sup>

The first plank of the order's platform, which declared for the maintenance of the Union as a paramount political good, Yancey saw as an endorsement of the *de facto* and not constitutional Union. To him the Third Degree meant only that Americans were sworn to maintain and crush secession or resistance. To the demand of the American platform that political differences be settled equitably, Yancey replied that equity in Alabama and Georgia would not necessarily be equity in Massachusetts. Know-Nothings, he warned, would substitute the resistance of the Georgia platform to the submission of difficulties to the Supreme Court as the only legal expounder of the Constitution—a monstrous doctrine and a revival of the Federalism of John Adams' day. Yancey was, of course, an extremist. But there were extremists throughout the South and these voted *en bloc* for the Democratic candidates.

Alabama Democrats attempted to show that the New England Americans had demonstrated, by electing Governor Henry J. Gardner and Senator Henry Wilson as delegates to the National Convention, that the Northern branch was definitely antislavery. Abolitionist articles and attempts to repeal or nullify the proslavery laws were attributed to Northern American leaders.

The Democrats of the Alabama First Congressional District issued an address to demonstrate that disfranchisement of Northern immigrants would not reduce Northern representation in Congress, and they also urged a program to teach these immigrants to appreciate the South and settle there. Also, it was pointed out that an increase in the period of residence for naturalization would not bar foreign voters, as suffrage is a state prerogative.

<sup>16</sup> DuBose, *Life and Times of William Lowndes Yancey*, 294.

Although the Democrats denied and deprecated danger to slavery from foreign immigration, privately a few of them endorsed their opponents' stand. C. C. Clay, Jr., writing from Washington in the fall of 1854, admitted that the reason he was so opposed to a homestead bill was that he feared it would send numbers of immigrants to the North who were naturally "precommitted to abolition." Publicly, Clay took the opposite view. In an open letter to William Garrett he declared, "It is true many foreigners in the northern states are abolitionists, but such is not the character of all of them—especially of the predominant race, the Irish."<sup>17</sup>

While reasonable Southern Democrats were willing to admit that most Southerners, and certainly those who owned slaves, were not abolitionists, yet they repeatedly contended that members of the new order were supporting a political organization whose ideals and actions were favorable to the abolitionists. Any denials were brushed away as quibbling. The Jacksonville *Florida News* believed that in the South every man who was tinged with free-soilism rushed into the ranks of the Americans and pointed to Sam Houston as an example of a Southern traitor.

Slavery was not the issue in Missouri that it was in other Southern states. The St. Louis *Weekly Intelligencer* took a markedly "Union" position, vigorously attacking Francis P. Blair, Sr., and Francis P. Blair, Jr. A few advocates saw the order as a free-soil instrument. D. R. Risley writing to Abiel Leonard referred to the new party as "more comonly [*sic*] known as 'Know Nothings' or Republic party." The successful machinations of the Blairs to control, to utilize, and partially to absorb the Missouri Americans made the party, though this was not always apparent, susceptible to "Emancipationism" and abolitionism.

The Americans spent much time and effort to prove that the Northern abolitionists hated the Americans. Some were reported as being turned out of the New York party for participating in abolitionist agitation. Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts was said to have been elected in spite of Know-Nothing opposition. W. H. Seward, it was announced, had been elected by a coalition of Democrats, Whigs, and renegade Americans who had lost their party standing. Clinching proof of the soundness of their North-

<sup>17</sup> C. C. Clay, Jr., to J. E. Broome, July 8, 1854, Clay Papers.

ern associates was best supplied by quoting from known abolition papers such as the *New Bedford Mercury*, the *Ohio Patriot*, the *Buffalo Express*, the *Albany Journal*, the *Chicago Journal*, the *Pittsburgh Journal*, the *Washington Era*, the *Detroit Advertiser*, the *Massachusetts Republican*, the *New York Tribune*, the *Boston Liberator*, the *Cleveland Leader*, the *Washington Union*, the *Cincinnati Commonwealth*, the *Wilmington Leader*, and the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. The *New York Tribune*, for example, was copied thus:

We ask all earnest opponents of the slave power to watch closely the progress of the Knownothing movement, and see if it does not justify our denunciation of it as a necessary ally of slavery—striking down this opponent in one state and keeping down that one in another—no matter though he belong to the order—simply because the interest growth and ascendancy of Nativism are held to require the submission to the exactions and behest of the Slave Power. Willfully blind must be ye who don't perceive this.<sup>18</sup>

The *Jeffersonian Democrat*, described as a roaring, ranting, and blustering abolition paper, was quoted as saying that "as a national party the Know Nothings are Pro-Slavery, and this fact is fully proved by their open advocacy of the southern man and slave holder. . . . The whole scheme is a southern plot to divert the north from the slavery question by an appeal to religious prejudices." Southern Americans maintained that it was the Democratic Party which was responsible for the election of so many abolitionists in the North, and they offered evidence sustaining this view. In reply to allegations of Northern American newspaper support of antislavery views, they replied that such organs were not official and that they denounced all connection with such views. The Democrats were queried; did they recognize abolitionist Democratic papers of the North as expressive of their views?

In the spring of 1855 the Georgia order issued a lengthy address in which people who refused to endorse the Kansas-Nebraska Bill were called unfit to be members of the party.

<sup>18</sup> *Richmond Daily Penny Post*, July 13, 1855.

There was a qualifying phrase repudiating the idea that unnaturalized foreigners should be allowed to vote in territorial elections. The acquisition of Cuba on "fair and honorable" grounds was advocated. The address pointed out that it was theoretically possible for an immigrant to land in New York, ten days later to arrive in Kansas, declare his intention to become a citizen, and go immediately to the polls and vote on the constitution of Kansas.

Southern members attempted to make it plain that they were in favor of wise moderation on the slavery question, sacrificing nothing for which they had a right to contend but at the same time sedulously avoiding unnecessary antagonisms to the prejudices of the North. The *Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel* criticized the Nashville *Banner* and the Nashville *Gazette* for advising the Tennesseans to repudiate the twelfth section of the Philadelphia platform. It saw this section as securing the constitutional rights of the South, as Congress had the right to protect slavery in the territories but no right to limit it. The ultimate decision, the editor argued, should rest with the people of the territory when it became a state. The Southern people, the editor averred, had no desire to make the American Party a proslavery party but wanted to take such high national and constitutional grounds as to allow the question of slavery to settle itself by a guarantee to all states of equal rights to the common property, or, in other words, the territories of the Union.

The *Penny Post* summed up the American position saying:

It has been charged that Know Nothingism is a nest of abolitionists but we feel that only in an American success can the Union be preserved and the rights of the slave South guaranteed. This can only be done when the deadliest enemies the South has, foreign immigrants at the ballot box, have been curbed. It cannot and will not be denied, that all the foreign immigrants are inimical to Southern institutions—made so by education, prejudice, and interest. They are taught in countries from which they emigrate to look upon slavery as a social and political evil, blighting and destroying all that is good and progressive. . . . They despise the slaveholders. Very few come South, whilst a very large majority stop in the North.



**HARRIET BEECHER STOWE,**  
**Fatteing her baby, to offer as a sacrifice to the**  
***Know Nothings.*"**

FROM THE KOSCIUSKO (MISS.) *Southern Sun*, SEPTEMBER 19, 1854



Northern population is thus multiplied, and consequently Northern representation in the National Congress.<sup>19</sup>

When Democrats made frequent statements that Negroes were prominent members in Northern councils, that they were working toward the abolition of the fugitive-slave law, that every Know-Nothing representative elected from the Northern states was pledged to repeal the Kansas-Nebraska Bill and to modify the fugitive-slave law, and that nine senators elected by American legislatures were uncompromisingly abolitionists, the Virginia members replied: "There are upwards of sixty thousand of voters of Virginia—a majority of them slave-owners—who belong to this party, and it is the height of effrontery, and a slander, to charge them with being the allies of Abolition. . . . [The American Party] will resist to the bitter end, *all* efforts to renew the slavery agitation, because they believe its renewal will endanger the Union."<sup>20</sup>

The state platform of the Alabama Americans in 1855 contained planks which endorsed nonintervention by the Federal government on the subject of slavery except for the protection of constitutional rights, and the perpetuity of the Union upon the principles of the Constitution with a strict regard for the rights of the states and the full exercise of all privileges not delegated to the Federal government. The last plank demanded the purity of the ballot box and the enforcement of law and order.

The usual issues presented by the party in all the Southern states showed that they wished to conduct the canvass on what was termed the "American issue"—very mild and indirect anti-Catholicism, a strong anteforeign stand, and a firm endorsement of Southern rights. A genuine love of Unionism was most frequently shown, though generally interpreted as state-rights constitutionalism versus abolitionist sectionalism.

Not the slightest criticism of slavery was permitted in the slave states, regardless of party affiliation. Not all Southerners, however, were ardent in their advocacy of slavery and state rights. For this latter group Americanism had a great appeal. It was the

<sup>19</sup> Richmond *Weekly Penny Post*, March 16, 1855.

<sup>20</sup> Raleigh *Tri-Weekly Star*, February 8, 1855.

only national party which honestly attempted to minimize slavery agitation and sectional bickering. Their supporters, despite the more radical innovations of early party organization, were conservative, or even perhaps slightly reactionary, in political principles. Conservatives, unionists, those who were economically or sentimentally indifferent to slavery, the professional and the traditional opponents to Democracy, and the nativists, all joined together to make the American Party. Party experience demonstrated that slavery and sectionalism could not be subordinated to, nor superseded by, nativistic issues. In the National Councils, and in Congress, Southern Americans were forced by the very nature of events, despite desire, party strategy and platform, more and more to discuss, to defend, and to vote on each and every issue as a sectional group. In action on issues of slavery they never proved false in final allegiance, though they abhorred extremists such as W. L. Yancey.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

### THE PARTY AND ORGANIZED RELIGIOUS FAITHS

THE WAVE of anti-Catholicism in the 1850's, abetted by political, economic, and social fears, furthered the growth of the party and the inclusion of antipapal provisions in its state rituals and platforms, though the hatred of Roman Catholicism must not be considered as more than one of the factors contributing to party support. Surveying the extended controversies between Protestants and Catholics from 1850 to 1854 under the title, "The Catholic Church Blunders,"<sup>1</sup> R. A. Billington pointed out that the papacy, powerful and overbearing in Europe, and misled by the rapid growth of the church in America, threw off its masks and previous restraints and arrogantly boasted of its intentions to dominate this country.

The rapid rise in the number of Catholic communicants in the United States was evidenced by the doubling of provinces with the creation of archiepiscopal sees in 1847 for St. Louis, Baltimore, and the Oregon Territory, and the addition of twenty-three suffragan sees to the existing twelve. The presence of over a thousand priests and almost as many churches with resident pastors, the holding of the first plenary council in Baltimore in May, 1852, the setting up of seats for archbishops in New Orleans, Cincinnati, and New York, the stationing of archbishops in New Orleans and Baltimore, making six for the nation,<sup>2</sup> alarmed nativists. When the great Hungarian patriot, Louis Kossuth, arrived in this country in 1851, two powerful Catholic or-

<sup>1</sup> Billington, *The Protestant Crusade 1800-1860*, 289-322.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Guilday (ed.), *The National Pastorals of the American Hierarchy* (Washington, 1923), 121, 171, 185-96.

gans attacked him, while Horace Greeley and others defended him warmly.<sup>3</sup>

Archbishop John Hughes of New York, the acknowledged Catholic leader in the United States, raised a storm of censure by his aggressive attacks upon Protestantism and upon the free public-school system. He bravely supported the Pastoral Letter of 1852 in which the Bishops had urged Catholics to support their schools lest their children should be snared away from the true faith<sup>4</sup> and had forcefully attempted to prevent the use of Protestant Bibles in the public schools even for Protestant children. Hughes's fight over the schools and the question of the right of the Papal Nuncio to force American laymen to relinquish titles to churches held by them was followed with critical interest in all parts of the nation. In the United States under the stimulus of the examples of democratic Protestant trustees holding ownership to church properties, certain Catholic titles had been vested in lay hands rather than in the name of the presiding Bishops. At least one state's law required the laity to hold title. When several such groups refused to surrender their deeds, Hughes lent his support to quell such an incipient revolt.

The quarrel in New York over title to church properties, known as the trusteeship question, led to the sending of a Papal Nuncio, Cardinal Gaetano Bedini, to exert the direct power of the Holy See in favor of the Hierarchy. His actions in Buffalo and New York City displeased many citizens, both Catholic and Protestant, as a reversal of democratic precedent. The thought that an "ambassador" of a "foreign prince" could settle disputes among Americans in America horrified many citizens. Many anti-Catholics regarded Bedini's mission as full proof of their contention that the popes claimed and attempted to exercise temporal powers in the United States. Continuing his travels in Canada and the United States, June 30, 1853, to February 4, 1854, he was followed by tirades and threats of mob violence. In several towns he was roughed and mobbed. His experience in Cincinnati so frightened him that he was afraid to fulfill his New Orleans engagements.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Paul J. Foik, *Pioneer Catholic Journalism* (New York, 1930), 200, citing *Brownson's Quarterly Review*, April, 1852, and the *Freeman's Journal*.

<sup>4</sup> Guilday, *The National Pastorals of the American Hierarchy*, 182-96.

<sup>5</sup> [Anspach], *The Sons of the Sires*, 23-29; Guilday, "Gaetano Bedini," *loc. cit.*, 31, 88-97; *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, October 14, 27, 1853.

Even Catholic New Orleans was plastered with red handbills denouncing him in four different languages as ". . . the Butcher of Bologna, . . . the tigre who is guilty of the murder of hundreds of Italian patriots, their wives and children in Italia, who ordered that Ugo Bassi the Patriotic Catholic priest be scalped before he was executed, will this abominable servant of despotism receive the same honors as the heroes of liberty? No! You will treat him as men treat a wild beast . . . the people of New Orleans will chastise Bedini." <sup>6</sup>

Bedini's inspection in Baltimore resulted in an angry demonstration, burning in effigy, and the firing of shots into a room at the home of the Archbishop, where he was staying. <sup>7</sup>

Another cause for outbursts during the travels of the Papal Nuncio and his companion Archbishop Hughes was the preaching of two fanatics, Daniel Parsons Orr, who called himself the "Angel Gabriel," and an apostate priest, Alessandro Gavazzi. This Italian, filled with bitter hatred of the reactionary policy of the Catholic Church in the recent Italian revolution, portrayed Bedini's part in the suppression of the revolution as that of a blood-stained monster. Gavazzi used the notorious persecution of the Madiati family for distributing Bibles in Italy to stir up hatred and feeling amongst Protestants and Catholics.

After the emergence of Know-Nothingism no dogmatic statement of its policy toward Roman Catholicism nationally, sectionally, or in any given state could be made, because it varied greatly. The national platforms and ritual would seem to give concrete approaches, but these become less reliable when the policies of such individual states as Maryland, Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi are considered. Again, it is not only a question of what party platforms, party leaders, and party members said; it is a question of what they meant by what they said.

It should be borne in mind that the party was always careful to state officially that its opposition to the Roman Catholics was only to those who bore temporal allegiance to the Pope. To some Americans this meant all Catholics, liberal as well as those ignorant

<sup>6</sup> New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, January 10, 1854. This bill referred to Bedini's part in suppressing the Revolutionaries of 1848 in Italy. According to Catholic sources, Guilday, "Gaetano Bedini," *loc. cit.*, 101-102, Ugo Bassi was executed along with some fifty others on the charge of murder, robbery, and rape, and thus was not a true martyr.

<sup>7</sup> Baltimore *Sun*, January 18, 1854.

and reactionary members who were willing and anxious to recognize such an obligation. The attacks upon the Church varied from well-chosen and ably illustrated objections and fears to coarse, unseemly, and ridiculous allegations. Titles of, or indications of the subject matter of, a few of the many hundreds of articles, communications, and letters that appeared in the newspapers or more rarely in pamphlet form may serve to illustrate their character. The following typical titles appeared in all the Southern states, even sparingly in Catholic Louisiana: "Papal Claims to Temporal Power," "Mississippi Soldier Denied Burial by Catholics in the War of 1812," "Roman Catholic Authorities on Persecutions," "Quotations From Dowling's *History of Romanism*," "Sanctity of Confessional Violations," "Higher Law Allegiance to Popery," "The Inquisition as It Is," "Perjury of Catholics," and "Jesuit Treachery."

Party propagandists produced date, page, and quotation from Catholic books and documents to substantiate their criticism of Catholic policy. Those so used included the St. Louis *Shepherd of the Valley*, *Rambler*, Boston *Pilot*, New York *Freedman's Journal*, Rome (Italy) *Civita Catholica*, and Paris (France) *Univers*. The October, 1852, issue of *Brownson's Quarterly* was quoted as saying: "The sorriest sight to us is a Catholic throwing up his cap and shouting 'All hail Democracy.' Let us dare assert the truth in the face of the eyeing world, and instead of pleading for our church at the bar of the State, summon the State itself to plead at the bar of the Church, its divinely constituted Judge."

Some interesting debates occurred on the subject of Catholicism during the Thirty-third and the Thirty-fourth Congresses.<sup>8</sup> Continually badgered by insinuations and flat statements that they were proscribing the Catholics and destroying religious freedom, the Americans in the House repeatedly protested and restated their position. Humphrey Marshall, for instance, declared that there was not one thing in the American ritual, belief, or practice to limit the largest amount of freedom of conscience and religion. He proclaimed his willingness to shed his own blood to defend a Catholic's freedom of conscience and worship; but he regarded as dangerous any Catholic recognition of political allegiance "con-

<sup>8</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 34 Cong., 1 Sess., 49, 157, Appendix, 967-69.

cealed if you choose, under the term of ecclesiastical rule" to any higher master than the Constitution. E. G. Reade of North Carolina, a month later, took a similar stand. The views of T. R. Whitney, a founder of the American Party, became the best known of any nativistic congressman through his books bearing on the controversy.

A splendid illustration of how anti-Catholicism could be made to fit sectional issues can be seen in the speech of Representative Bayard Clark of New York.<sup>9</sup> He found a natural affinity of Jesuitism and slavery. The foreign-born citizens who had supported Buchanan, he had discovered, were with rare exceptions the subjects of the Roman hierarchy, "and consequently friendly to the despotic *principle*, of which slavery is the logical necessity." The Protestant foreigners, on the other hand, he believed were intelligent, unshackled, and able to stand against slavery. George Eustis, congressman from Louisiana, where the state council was composed largely of Catholics, speaking on the House floor on the religious attitude of the National party, gained much attention by uncompromisingly rejecting the eighth section of the National Ritual and defending his Catholic constituents.

On May 15, 1854, Lewis Cass discussed a report from the Foreign Relations Committee on the religious rights of American citizens traveling or residing abroad. His speech covered some nine and one-half pages in the *Globe*; a large part of it was devoted to a reply to Archbishop Hughes's letter, "Religious Freedom, the Madiai, and Proceedings in the Senate of the United States," which had been published in the *New York Freedman's Journal*. Hughes had argued that the suppression of the Madiai family and their Protestant Bibles by the Tuscan government was similar to suppression of the teachings of abolitionists in New Orleans, and that congressional action would have no practical effect other than "to stir up sectarian animosities against his Catholic fellow-citizens." Cass regarded such reasoning as erroneous and maintained that action to protect freedom of conscience was not a sectarian matter. He discounted Archbishop Hughes's argument that "freedom of conscience . . . is inviolable in its very nature and essence. To say that any man or any nation has either physical

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 34 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 955-57.

or moral power to destroy freedom of conscience, is to give utterance to a patent absurdity," by portraying a number of historical instances where force, torture, and cruelty had been victorious over conscience. Replying to the clergyman's assertion that each government might choose its own laws and enforce them, Cass said, ". . . man has a right to worship God unrestrained by human laws." Continuing, he described in detail contemporary examples of religious intolerance, particularly in the backward Catholic countries of South America, Italy, and Spain. He closed by asking: "And are the representatives of the American people to lay their hands on their mouths, and their mouths in the dust, to look on and see the persecutions and oppressions to which their countrymen are exposed abroad, and not even express their displeasure and their demands?"<sup>10</sup>

Senator G. E. Badger called Cass's attention to an article in the *St. Louis Shepherd of the Valley*, a newspaper published, he asserted, under the auspices of the Bishop of that diocese. Badger probably referred to the frequently quoted extract taken from the issue of November 23, 1851: "The Church is, of necessity, intolerant. Heresy she endures when and where she must; but she hates it, and directs all her energies to its destruction. If Catholics ever gain an immense numerical majority, religious freedom in this country is at an end: so say our enemies—so say we."<sup>11</sup>

Speaking in the House, on January 11, 1855, William Russell Smith gave a lengthy account of the transformation of Catholicism from a period of "early Humility of the Roman Catholic Bishops" through their increase in power, down through their struggles with the English kings. He discussed "The Terror of Excommunication," "Mental Reservations," and the "Arrogance of the Catholic Church." In true Know-Nothing fashion he ended by declaring that his party required no religious test for office and wanted no law respecting the establishment of religion or the free exercise thereof.<sup>12</sup>

There is conflicting opinion in regard to the attitude of the Catholic Church toward the temporal powers of the Papacy. It is not within the province of this study to assert the official view of

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 34 Cong., 1 Sess., 166-67, Appendix, 681-91.

<sup>11</sup> Nashville *Banner of Peace*, June 28, 1855; Brownlow, *Americanism Contrasted*, 28.

<sup>12</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., Appendix, 94-103.

the Catholic Church. Regardless of what the Church taught, there was no unanimity on the question among the laity or the priesthood. Although the Bishops in Council at Baltimore in 1855 officially proclaimed: "You know that we have uniformly taught you both publicly and privately, to perform all the duties of good citizens, and that we have never exacted of you, as we ourselves have never made even to the highest ecclesiastical authority, any engagement inconsistent with the duties we owe to the country and its laws. . . . and even in our communication to the late Pontiff we rejected as a calumny the imputation that we were in civil matters subject to his authority."<sup>13</sup> The question of an individual's acceptance or rejection was undeterminable.

Bishop John McGill of Virginia published a letter in which he denied the orthodoxy of the view that the Pope held temporal powers in the United States, and that citizens owed first allegiance to the Pope on political questions. He said that the oath contained in the Creed of Pius IV and administered to certain Catholics in his opinion meant obedience to the Pope only as head of the Church. He acknowledged that this, however, was only his opinion and that other theologians of the Church held different views.<sup>14</sup>

O. A. Brownson, perhaps the most prominent Catholic lay editor, wrote to Hugh J. Davis of Warrenton, North Carolina, that the Pope's decisions as to whether or not the Constitution of the United States was repugnant to his faith were and should be accepted without question by all American Catholics.<sup>15</sup>

Mary St. Patrick McConville, in a study on political nativism in Maryland, stated that "officially" the Catholic Church deplored slavery, but regarded it as a civil institution not within the jurisdiction of the Church, and followed the policy that agitation and association with abolitionists was unwise.<sup>16</sup> The Bardstown *Gazette*, a Catholic journal, challenged any American editor to "instance a solitary Catholic, North or South, native or foreign, who is an abolitionist."

<sup>13</sup> Cluskey, *Political Text-Book or Encyclopedia*, 645.

<sup>14</sup> Wise, *The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia, 1806-1876*, 184-86; Charlottesville *Jeffersonian Republican*, October 12, 1854.

<sup>15</sup> Jacksonville *Florida Republican*, August 16, 1855.

<sup>16</sup> McConville, *Political Nativism in the State of Maryland*, 85, citing the *Metropolitan*, III (June, 1855), 265-78.

When the American National Council met in Philadelphia on June 5, 1855, William Alexander of Maryland, chairman of the committee on the ritual, recommended a change specifically stating that the order would welcome American Catholics to its ranks. As a result, the council abandoned the eighth section of the national platform of 1855, which pledged "resistance to the aggressive policy of the Roman Catholic Church in our country. . . . and a jealous resistance of all attempts of any sect or denomination or church to obtain an ascendancy over any other in the State . . . by a political combination of its members, or by a division of their civil allegiance with any foreign power, potentate or ecclesiastic." The following more conciliatory statement (section five) was adopted: "No person should be selected for political station (whether native or foreign birth) who recognizes any allegiance or obligation of any description to any foreign prince, potentate, or power, or who refuses to recognize the Federal and State Constitutions (each within its sphere) as a paramount to all other laws as issues of political action." The change left the gate wide open for Catholics, although many quibbled and said the change was worse than the original statement.<sup>17</sup>

Those who were diehards in their fears of any and all Catholics raged against this change as an abandonment of a fundamental of the party. One of these, Kenneth Rayner, spoke in Monument Square in Baltimore and protested against "insidious priestly aggression."

The action taken in regard to the admittance of the Louisiana delegation is not clear. Gayarré, who was a delegate, stated that one Catholic and five Protestants were sent in order to test the anti-Catholic qualifications of the organization. Although Gayarré was not admitted as a delegate he made a speech before the convention in which he protested against the religious clause of the Constitution "which excluded from political rights a million and a half native citizens—the Catholics." He said that an attempt to eradicate Roman Catholicism was unconstitutional, that though he considered himself a Catholic he laughed at any priest's claim to have jurisdiction over his temporal affairs, and ridiculed the idea

<sup>17</sup> Baltimore *Sun*, June 23, 1855; McConville, *Political Nativism in the State of Maryland*, 114.



of danger from Rome. Gayarré wished to substitute for the words "Roman Catholic" this phrase: ". . . and all who, whatever be their religious creed, cannot declare under oath that they acknowledge in these United States of America no other political power than that which is derived from the Federal Constitution and the respective sovereignty of the states composing the Confederacy." He then threatened complete secession of the entire Louisiana order and the support of an independent candidate unless the religious tests were abandoned.<sup>18</sup>

The Americans in Louisiana counseled deliberate action, though the religious test was almost spontaneously rejected. The New Orleans *Bee* believed: "The platform of the American Convention . . . is perfectly sound and satisfactory, with one fatal and insurmountable exception. The religious test will be repudiated not alone by the Americans of Louisiana, but by honest citizens everywhere."

On July 4, 1855, the Louisiana order, in considering the proceedings of the National Council, and in spite of rumors of separation, endorsed in general its actions. One resolution, the ninth, repudiated the principles that were directed against Catholicism, "holding it as a cardinal maxim that religious faith is a question between each individual and his God."

Know-Nothings in Louisiana criticized the Catholics in only a few incidents and then indirectly, as when they denounced the Jesuits as a secret political body, within the Church, that grasped for temporal power.

Thousands of stanch Catholics supported the Americans. One such was a very influential French Creole priest, Adrien Rouquette, who published two pamphlets in French under the pseudonym "Mucius" in defense of the American Party. He endorsed Gayarré's stand upon the Catholic test at the National Convention. He believed that the new party's victory in Louisiana would greatly check the national organization on the religious question, while a defeat would permit the national party to become more proscriptive, as they would then not consider Louisiana's actions. His arguments were uncompromising: "I don't hesitate to affirm

<sup>18</sup> Charles Gayarré, *Address to the General Assembly of the Know Nothing Party held in Philadelphia, May, 1854*, 1-4.

that the American Party of Louisiana, if it wins the election, can alone, more than the Democratic Party, avoid a religious war in the United States." He urged support of "this magnificent national party which can alone save the republic, which alone can save us from the excesses of demagoguery and the dismemberment of the Union and from the aberrations of socialism, and of the scorn of the primitive institutions and the loss of our glorious individuality, and from the evils of civil war or a foreign war, and from the cruel horrors of religious fanaticism."<sup>19</sup>

There was, however, apparently an anti-Catholic group partially organized in the state, for early in July, 1855, E. B. Bartlett, "President of the National Council of the United States of North America," published a card in the New Orleans papers revoking "a certain dispensation heretofore granted to C. W. Hardy and ——— Perry, of New Orleans, La., whereby they or either of them were empowered to establish Subordinate Councils and a State Council in the State of Louisiana aforesaid." No one knew who "——— Perry" was, although it was well known that Hardy was seeking to organize what became known as the "blue-book" or "blue-light" Know-Nothings upon a sectarian, bigoted, and fanatical anti-Catholic ritual.<sup>20</sup>

The established party editors refused to recognize Hardy and belittled his efforts. Hardy then rushed into print with his troubles. The opposition papers seized upon his articles and published them widely, for it was said they represented the true anti-Catholic beliefs of the Know-Nothings and were also indicative

<sup>19</sup> "Je n'hésite pas à affirmer que le parti américain, de la Louisiane s'il sort victorieux de la lutte électorale, peut, plus que le parti démocrate, peut même seul, empêcher une guerre de religion aux États-Unis."

"... ce grand, ce sublime parti national que peut seul sauver la République, qui peut seul nous préserver à la fois et des excès de la démagogie, et du démembrement de l'Union, et des aberrations du socialisme, et du mépris de nos institutions primitives, et de la perte de notre individualité glorieuse, et des maux d'une guerre intestine ou étrangère, et des cruelles horreurs du fanatisme religieux." Adrien Roquette (Mucius), *Aux Electeurs De La Louisiane La Question Américaine* (Nouvelle-Orléans, 1855), Pt. II, 27, 29.

<sup>20</sup> New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, July 2, 1855; Gayarré had said in the convention in June, "Brothers, the constitution of the order which proscribes not only Catholics but also Protestants who married Catholic wives, and which goes even so far as to strike at the Protestant children of Catholic parents, is already known in Louisiana under the name of 'Blue Book'! A suitable appellation indeed! Beware brother, beware!" Gayarré, *Address to the General Assembly of the Know Nothing Party held in Philadelphia, May, 1854*, 32.

of schism and weakness in the party. It was in fact only in opposition papers that he could get a hearing. Hardy issued a long address saying that when he had been requested as the corresponding secretary of the American Councils of Louisiana to publish a series of resolutions passed by Washington Council No. I, Jefferson Council No. II, and Orleans Council No. III, condemnatory of the action of the State Council in repudiating the eighth article of the national platform, he was "refused space by the *Crescent*, *Picayune*, *Delta*, and *Exponent*." Hardy claimed to be the true representative of the party, and bitterly denied that the withdrawal of authority by Bartlett was genuine. He strongly resented being called a "Blue Book-man," and said his party drew its power from the parent fountain and used a ritual in strict conformity with national principles of hostility to foreign domination and papish interference and "would not crouch or lick the hands of the Janus faces of Rome or fawn upon Jesuits." Hardy regarded members of the state order as secessionists and untrue to what he considered the vital principle of Know-Nothingism—hostility toward "Jesuitical influence."<sup>21</sup>

This faction had a few adherents in the Protestant part of the state—the northern parishes. The council at Sparta, in Bienville Parish, endorsed the whole national platform and denounced the action of the State Council in nullifying the eighth article as contrary to the fundamental principles of the party.

In July, Hardy and his few adherents met in New Orleans and nominated a "National American Ticket." The nominees for attorney general, superintendent of education, auditor, and lieutenant governor were the same as those of the regular ticket. John Ray, whom they nominated for the governorship, promptly and indignantly declined. The other nominees also refused to leave the regulars' ranks. Hardy could make no progress with his party, which broke up in November for lack of support and, as it was maliciously rumored, through financial corruption. Its ticket received no votes in the final election.

One of the most harped upon and harmful charges in the Louisiana state campaigns was that the Americans were antagonistic

<sup>21</sup> Baton Rouge *Weekly Comet*, October 14, 1855; Opelousas (Louisiana) *Courier*, August 11, September 11, October 6, 21, 27, 1855.

towards Catholicism. Long articles, communications, letters, editorials, speeches, and innuendos were published in the Democratic papers asserting that the party planned the overthrow of the Catholic religion; that it did not and would not support a Catholic candidate for office. This assertion was made in spite of the fact that Charles Derbigny, the American nominee for governor, was undoubtedly a Catholic, as had been his parents and as was his own wife and family. J. V. Duralde, the nominee for state treasurer, was a Catholic, as were many nominees for the legislature and parish and municipal offices. It was claimed in the southern part of the state that Louis Texada was a Catholic, but this was doubtful. Catholics were told that A. Oliver, a Know-Nothing orator, "in a public speech at Opelousas, had denounced our Saviour as 'a scoundrel and an imposter'—'un polisson et un imposteur.' " They were told that the Americans "intended to destroy the Catholic religion, pull down the Church, and drive Catholics out of the country," and that "their wives would 'no longer be permitted' to worship, and if they attempted it, they 'would be kicked out.' " <sup>22</sup>

Democratic editors of the state asserted that no true Catholic could support the new order's program, and that those members in Louisiana who denied these charges did so only to get the Catholic vote. The Know-Nothings realized that this group more than held the balance of power in the state and used all means to correct this erroneous or rather willfully misconstrued interpretation of their beliefs. They declared emphatically early in the formative period of the party that they held religious toleration to be one of the bases of American government.

As overt evidence of sound religious views, Americans in the Louisiana state legislature repealed the customary resolution to invite ministers of Baton Rouge in rotation to open the sessions "because of objections to the expense." Then the Americans introduced a measure to select a Catholic chaplain, which the Democrats feared to oppose. The Know-Nothings contrasted their favorable attitude toward the Catholics with Democratic hostility toward a Catholic chaplain, but they soon found that they had bitten off their own nose to spite their face. In appealing to the

<sup>22</sup> Baton Rouge *Sugar Planter*, July 11, 1855.

Catholics they had aggrieved the Protestants. After several attempts a resolution was passed authorizing the speaker to appoint the chaplain.<sup>23</sup>

As in Louisiana, Americans as a party in Maryland did not show the same hostility toward the foreign Catholics as in many other states. Both L. F. Schmeckebier and Mary St. Patrick McConville, who have written monographs on the party in Maryland, gave the opposite impression. An examination of their authorities shows that they both cited anti-Catholic literature that was national in character rather than local. The latter, following the *Baltimore Catholic Mirror* very closely, naturally found the Catholic phase distorted.<sup>24</sup> Files of other contemporary Maryland papers show considerable moderation on this line. The editor of the *Baltimore Patriot and Commercial Gazette* stated that he heartily endorsed the American program, yet the "Religious test" was one thing he would like to have changed. He advised modification of the platform to this extent.

There is little doubt that there were many Catholics in the Maryland American Party but no evidence of open advocacy of the party by Catholic clergy as there was in Louisiana. Here the hierarchy, as far as it could without supplying "proof" of Catholic political activity, brought adverse pressure to bear on Church members. The *Catholic Mirror*, a newspaper, and the *Metropolitan*, a magazine, both published in Baltimore, answered American charges of temporal allegiance by printing the Pastoral of the Archbishop of Baltimore at the Eighth Provincial Council. This began: "Respect and obey the constitutional authorities, for all power is from God, and they that resist, resist the ordinances of God, and purchase for themselves damnation. To General and State Governments you owe allegiance in all that regards civil order: the authorities of the Church challenge your obedience in the things of salvation. We have no need of pressing this distinction which you fully understand."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, February 2, January 29, 1855; *Journal of the House of Representatives* (Louisiana), 1856, 23.

<sup>24</sup> McConville, *Political Nativism in the State of Maryland*, *passim*; Schmeckebier, "History of the Know Nothing Party in Maryland," *loc. cit.*, *passim*; *Baltimore Patriot*, August 7, 1855.

<sup>25</sup> McConville, *Political Nativism in the State of Maryland*, 101.

The *Catholic Mirror* asked how its coreligionists could be held aggressive and corruptive when there were only two of them in the House of Representatives? It pointed out that "thirty-five hundred clergymen" memorializing against the Kansas-Nebraska Bill had not one priest among them. The editor was willing to admit that there might be some danger to American institutions from "infidel Germans," but wished the world to know that the Irish Catholics were sound and desirable.

Alabama to a lesser degree than Maryland and Louisiana also tempered the national anti-Catholic phase of Americanism. The American state platform of June, 1855, was almost silent upon the Catholic issue. The fifth plank advocated protection to all persons "in the inestimable privilege of worshipping God in the manner most agreeable to their consciences," but opposed the election of any man who recognized the right of any denomination whatever to exercise political power or any "higher" law. The *Mobile Advertiser* stated very plainly: "The American party of Alabama never acknowledged the religious test, but on the contrary, distinctly and emphatically repudiated everything in the National organization, looking that way. The order was introduced here from Louisiana, on precisely the same principles as contained there, and in the very act of the State Council allying itself with the National Council, the broadest ground was assumed in favor of liberty of conscience and of religion, and against any attempted interference therewith, directly or indirectly by the American Party."

After the state election in 1855 the Americans in a huge Know-Nothing mass meeting at Montgomery reiterated their attitude by resolving: "We denounce as false and unauthorized any construction of the Eighth Article which would apply the principles therein asserted to Catholics who are Americans by birth, education and training . . . or which would make these principles speak either as an abridgement of religious liberty or as an attempt to establish religious belief as a test for political office."<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, the *Montgomery Mail* began to give an important amount of space to anti-Catholic articles. One lengthy series which ran intermittently for several months was a harsh and uncompromising attack incorporating the extreme Protestant objec-

<sup>26</sup> Cahaba (Alabama) *Dallas Gazette*, August 24, 1855.

tions to the Catholics, past and present. Written by a retired octogenarian Protestant Irish minister, most of the articles dealt with historical persecutions and religious dogmas, supplemented by a reprint of Brownson's rash pronouncements.

A party of men said by the Democrats to be nativists set upon Father Nachon, a teacher at Spring Hill College, as he was on his way to a mission chapel on Dog River. This and the beating of a priest near Mobile are the only occurrences of outright violence against Catholics in Alabama. Even these may be discounted as they are perhaps the same incidents, since it was asserted that the latter attack was caused not by religious feeling, but by gross misconduct on the part of the priest among his parishioners.<sup>27</sup>

William Russell Smith, a Federal representative from the state, averred that the Know-Nothings were warring not against fellow citizens but on "an enemy sworn to secrecy—the Jesuits," whose oath he "quoted" and whose history he revealed as a vast power consistently used in antidemocratic intrigue. "Having sworn obedience to the Pope," he averred, "they swear no allegiance—except with mental reservations—to the Constitution of the United States. They are ready to teach the Catholic laity who apply for citizenship, that the oath to support the Constitution of the United States is no oath at all when it conflicts with their duty to the Popes or to the Bishops." His sketch of the Catholic Church in England seemed designed to sustain his charges of papal attempts to exercise temporal authority in other lands than Italy.<sup>28</sup>

The order in Alabama's two neighboring states of Georgia and Mississippi, while at times attacking Catholicism in no uncertain terms, showed a certain lack of spontaneity of feeling that was apparent elsewhere, yet articles appeared on the evils of the confessional, on priests' assertions of the nonsanctity of Protestant marriage, on the temporal claims of the Church, on Brownson's rabid statements, and on Gavazzi's exposés of the Papacy. Letters from John Wesley were cited to prove that Catholics need not keep oaths to heretics. Lafayette was quoted as warning that if the liberties of the United States ever were destroyed, it would be by "Romanish priests."

Papal bulls, especially those of Sixtus V, were often printed in

<sup>27</sup> Cahaba (Alabama) *Dallas Gazette*, May 16, 23, 1855; Michael Kenny, *Catholic Culture in Alabama* (New York, 1930), 180.

<sup>28</sup> Smith, *The American Party and Its Mission*, 1-8.

part with comments. Citations from "leading writers, doctors, and canonists" of the church were published. The dubious story of Josephine Bunkley was given credence. The horrors of the Inquisition were portrayed. Charges of dangerous political machinations by the Catholics, and their potential enmity toward popular education were often made by "contributors."

The *Item* of Fort Adams, Mississippi, published by a man whose credulity was great, or whose editorial conscience was elastic, was very thorough in its adherence to all extremes of the movement. The editorial policy of the *Natchez Courier* was much more cautious in many respects, but the editor still found space to print lengthy criticism of the history and policies of the Catholic Church. Giles M. Hillyer in his Mississippi campaign for representative referred to the April, 1854, issue of Brownson's *Review* to confirm the often-repeated charge that American Catholics recognized temporal allegiance to the Pope.

An incident in which the Natchez postmaster replaced two employees of some years standing with two young Catholic boys, thus making the entire force Catholic, provided "proof" of Catholic motives and actions. The Port Gibson *Herald* also circulated the rumor that a mail rider was to be fired because he had joined "a party critical to the religious beliefs of the Postmaster General."

As usual, the Know-Nothings quite honestly insisted that they stood for 100 per cent religious freedom and were not in the slightest degree proscriptive in nature. They banned only those, they asserted, who held a temporal allegiance other than to their American government. They angrily, but futilely, challenged the Democrats to cite the planks of the American platform which were proscriptive, or to "stop lying." They endorsed John M. Berrien, of Georgia, who argued: "If a voter believes the religion of a candidate to be unsound and dangerous to an extent which would induce distrust in the ordinary transactions of life, it is not only his right, but his duty to withhold his confidence and his vote. No provisions of the Constitution forbid it, and duty to the country requires it." <sup>29</sup>

The Americans grew irritated when the Democratic papers "misread, misunderstood, and distorted" the ritual, platforms, and

<sup>29</sup> Greensboro (North Carolina) *Patriot*, October 3, 1855.



statement of position of the party on this matter. The *Wilkinson Whig* reasonably acknowledged that there were some Know-Nothings and their papers that were anti-Catholic, but pointed out that general reasoning of this sort would establish Democrats as being antislavery, as there were Democratic papers and Democrats strongly antislavery.

Anti-Catholicism seemed to play a very small part in Americanism in Florida. The second resolution passed by the state convention on December 1, 1855, stated: "That the American Party of Florida unqualifiedly condemns and will endeavor to counteract all efforts by any sect or party to bring about a union of Church and State—and utterly disclaim any intention to prescribe a Religious test as a qualification for office, and that in defending the principles of the American Party—we wish it distinctly understood that we war against no man's religious principles."

A Leon County group resolved: "That while we shall ever protest against any abridgment of religious liberty—holding it as a cardinal maxim that religious faith is a question between each individual and his God: we utterly condemn any bargain effected by any political party through the Priests and Ministers of the Gospel, for the votes of its members and influence of the Church as corrupting in its tendencies, dangerous in its consequences, and ought not to be countenanced by our civil, political, or religious institutions." <sup>30</sup>

Copies of a speech delivered by former Democratic Governor R. K. Call of Florida on July 4, 1855, in Nashville, Tennessee, were distributed in Florida. Call wished all men to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences; but said that while some of his best friends were Catholics, he was willing to declare "resistance to the aggressive policy and corrupting tendencies of the Roman Catholic Church." He was alarmed over "higher allegiance" to the Pope and quoted from *Brownson's Review*, January 7, 1853, for justification of his alarm. He warned: "Your government is in danger of subversion by the power of foreign influence, against which you have been warned by Washington and Jackson. Your republican institutions were born and grew up on this hemisphere, far from the influence and contagion of

<sup>30</sup> Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, October 20, 1855.

Catholic monarchies. Our relative position has changed. Steam and electricity have revolutionized the physical world—they have precipitated time and concentrated events; the past will give you but little guide for the future—the nations of the earth are brought together. The Catholic monarchies of Europe are brought in contact with Republican America.”

The *Florida Republican* in 1856 jeered at the Democratic journals for their “futile” attempts to stir up Catholics against members of the new order and claimed two new Catholic subscribers the day before. A few months later it gave free publicity of a friendly nature to a box supper of the “Ladies of the Catholic Church” to raise money for their church.

As a general rule Florida Americans largely adopted the attitude of the *Floridian* and *Sentinel* that religion was “altogether too sacred to be sported with.”

In the two Southern states where Know-Nothingism gained only a comparatively slight hold, Arkansas and South Carolina, anti-Catholicism, while attempted, won only meager support. Students of St. Mary’s College, South Carolina, were afraid to attend because of apprehensions that assaults would be made on the school at any moment. Former pupils stoned the priests, and groups of armed men visited the school after a student who had smeared blood over his face and clothing told that he had been beaten. Violence was averted, but the faculty and remaining students kept armed guard for several nights.<sup>31</sup>

Albert Pike, leader of early Americanism in Arkansas, was fully aware of the penetration of the European type of Catholicism into America and disliked intensely the foreign cast and dominance of the American Catholic Church. Worried over the party’s Catholic plank, he endeavored at the Philadelphia Council and Convention to include a clearer statement that the hostility of the party toward the temporal powers of the Pope was not condemnatory of the whole American Catholic Church. Protestantism was so entrenched in Arkansas that the Democrats did not risk losing adherents by making a strong defense of Catholicism, merely advising, “If you are Protestant you know you already hate the Catholics enough.”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> O’Connell, *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia: Leaves of Its History*, 245, 249.

<sup>32</sup> Little Rock *True Democrat*, July 24, 1855.

With the exception of the editors of and contributors to a few bitter anti-Catholic sheets such as the *Hannibal True American* and the *St. Louis Weekly True Shepherd and Cascade*, most Missouri Americans were not interested in religions as a social or political problem. The few anti-Catholic adherents followed a common pattern of accusation and denunciation that had appeared and was to appear for so many years in the United States, injecting little that was new or original, though one writer asserted that popery opposed slavery because of Catholicism's despotic background!

The *St. Louis Weekly Intelligencer*, usually mild in its attitude toward Catholicism, was aroused in the spring of 1856 over "a scheme of the Catholics" to get control of the St. Louis public schools in accordance with the "ultra Catholic hierarchy's policies." The editor reported without comment an account of a Hannibal mob's action in damaging the house of a priest following a Protestant revival during which a Catholic girl had been baptized and sent by relatives on the following day to a convent. Quiet had only been restored after a committee interviewed the young lady, who announced her entry into the convent would be of her own volition.

Missouri Democratic leaders tended to heighten religious issues more often than the nativists, generally unsuccessfully. Roman Catholics subscribed to American papers, and at the behest of their political leaders in St. Louis even voted for Know-Nothings.

Expressions of dislike and distrust of the traditional European type of Roman Catholicism were most violent in the states of Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Texas. The last state had a considerable Catholic population concentrated along the Gulf and the old Mexican settlements. A Catholic missionary has observed that in 1855 "if a line was drawn from Eagle Pass through Fredericksburg and up to Nacogdoches, there would be found not a single priest north of that line." There were over twenty thousand Catholics in the state with only nine priests in 1852. In 1853 these were increased to twenty, plus a number of religious, both men and women. The Catholic Church was beginning to expand, for the Brothers of Mary were opening a college in San Antonio, and the Sisters of the Incarnate Word were build-

ing a convent and teaching girls at Brownsville. Missions were being planned for the Rio Grande Valley and for east Texas.<sup>33</sup>

Alarmed by Catholic activities and remembering the days preceding 1836, when they had lived under a state church, numbers of Texans welcomed the revival of nativism. One such wrote from west Texas to a Presbyterian journal in Tennessee: "So it is seen that even in this state where only twenty-five years ago, the intolerable ritual of papacy held absolute sway, and Protestants were not permitted to pray aloud, now native Americanism and liberal religion carry the day."<sup>34</sup>

The San Antonio *Ledger* vigorously assaulted the Americans as intolerant, admitted that Catholic priests were working against the new party, but asked how was this wrong? Had not the Americans elected a Protestant minister as head of the State Grand Council? How could such "few" Catholics menace the great Protestant majority in the state, they asked, especially since not one Catholic held a high state office. The Austin *Times* had no hesitation in attributing an American defeat in Bexar County to the machinations of the priests among the Mexicans there.

It is impossible for the intellectual and reflecting portion of the American people to close their eyes to the fact that some unseen and dangerous element has been at work among these benighted people, more to be feared than an army in battle array, more to be dreaded than the bristling bayonets and flashing swords of an open avowed foe. A corrupt sneaking and licentious priesthood, the most unscrupulous and corrupt that ever disgraced any land, have been actively engaged around the altars of their churches and at the firesides of their proselytes. The cross has been prostituted and for what? To aid the machinations of the demagogue and to render futile the attempt of Americans to rule America. The worst passions and the silliest fears of the deluded horde of Mexican *peones* [*sic*] who populate to such a dangerous extent the county of Bexar have been appealed to by a squad of black robed villains,

<sup>33</sup> P. F. Parisot, *The Reminiscences of a Texas Missionary* (San Antonio, 1899), 6-10. The Austin *Texas State Gazette*, August 4, 1855, placed the number at 6,790. This is undoubtedly in error, as nearly every Mexican was a Catholic, and they numbered several times this many.

<sup>34</sup> Nashville *Banner of Peace*, March 22, 1855.

who exercise over the minds of their miserable followers a despotism more absolute than that of any Turkish nobleman over those who people his seraglio.

Into the hands of these priests, fellow citizens, the ballot box has been placed in San Antonio. Serpent like have they entered into the jacals of their countrymen and there hissed into the ears of the inmates the mandates from which a Mexican has no appeal, and the consequence has been that on election day a horde of political lepers have crawled to the ballot box and there nullified the votes of thousands of your countrymen who had weighed well the principles in controversy.

The recognized spokesman for the American Party in Tennessee was the Methodist minister, William G. Brownlow. In the preface of the campaign book *Americanism Contrasted*, Brownlow stated: "For the past twenty-five years, the writer of this work has employed much of his time in the reading and study of the controversy between Roman Catholics and Protestants . . . he has kept up a fierce and unceasing fire against that dangerous and immoral corporation . . . because he believes that the system of Popery . . . is injurious to the private morals of the civilized world; and if unchecked, will overturn the civil and religious liberties of the United States. Such he believes, is its tendencies and the design of its leaders." He claimed that the "corrupt clergy" and "Jesuitical teachers" by vile means were trying to impress on the citizens of Knoxville that they were being misrepresented when certain Catholic magazines and bishops were quoted. Brownlow sought to set the citizens right on the true situation as he saw it. He asserted, for example, that most Catholics who took oaths on Protestant Bibles in the courtrooms did not regard their oaths as sacred.

The *American's Text-Book*, in defending the nonadmittance of Catholics to the Tennessee Party, said that parishioners had to confess everything to the priests, who could absolve them from any oath or obligation, and that therefore their admittance would defeat the very aims of the order. Nor, reasoned the *American's Text-Book*, could any Catholic believing in the temporal powers of the Pope truly swear allegiance to the Constitution and Government as the order's ritual required. It repelled Democratic

statements of proscription by asking: if Democrats opposed Americans, could not Americans have equal rights to vote against Catholics if they wished? The Democrats were advised to practice what they preached.

The *Banner of Peace* and the *True Whig*, with the blatant *Memphis Eagle*, continuously thundered, during 1855 and 1856, against the foreign Catholicism. Brownlow was particularly incensed over the Reverend A. B. Longstreet's open letter to "Methodist Know Nothing Preachers," stinging attacking Methodists who favored nativism, which was printed by most Democratic journals throughout the South.

Although given no credit for sincerity upon this point by their opponents, most Kentucky Americans honestly felt that there was a religious menace and they could see nothing even closely akin to intolerance or proscription in their party's planks. They had attempted early in their organization to make their position clear by insisting that opposition to Catholic politics was not opposition to religious freedom. It is worthy of note that the State Executive Council on June 13, 1855, issued instructions that a person having a Catholic wife was perfectly eligible for membership, even though the original National Ritual discouraged this.<sup>35</sup>

In May, 1855, Dr. R. J. Breckinridge wrote to A. R. Hodges, of the Frankfort *Commonwealth*, stating his position in regard to the American Party. In answer to numerous inquiries and invitations to speak, he expressed a conviction and belief in a victory for the Americans in the coming canvass. The country was convinced, he was sure, that United States nationality, Protestant civilization, and the National Union were endangered. He expanded at great length upon the dangers of the immigration of millions of papists and infidels to the American "Protestant civilization."

A similar argument against certain aspects of Catholicism was continued in various issues of the *Commonwealth*, which published communications, each four or five columns in length, from "A Native American," upon such subjects as "Opposition of the Papacy to Liberty" and "The Secret Oaths, Mysteries and Horrors of the Catholic Church."

<sup>35</sup> Frankfort *Commonwealth*, July 10, 1855.

Garrett Davis, speaking in Frankfort on July 1, told his audience of dangers from papal claims to temporal authority, but he was careful to follow with the statement that he was adverse to interference with the exercise of any man's religion and that he would fight, if necessary, to secure liberty of conscience and worship to all. Yet, he said, he would not vote for any man who acknowledged allegiance to the Pope or to any foreign country. He advised American Catholics to follow the precedent set up by the Episcopal Church. Davis was not a recent convert to fears of papal powers in America, for in the Kentucky constitutional convention of 1849 he had made two long and bitter speeches on this subject. These were reprinted and used during the campaigns of 1855 and 1856.

While the religious question popped up occasionally after 1855, it was to a large extent ignored. A priest took his regular turn in opening sessions of the legislature with prayer and the Americans made no objections.

Kenneth Rayner's place in forming the national party and the party in North Carolina gave his anti-Catholic views much prominence. Not a reactionary, in the state convention of 1835, he had made a very impassioned plea to strike out and amend the thirty-second article of the old Constitution which provided that no one who denied the truth of the Protestant religion should be capable of holding any state office.

In the widely publicized written debate between Kenneth Rayner and Henry A. Wise, Wise protested that Protestant ministers could handle the dangers, if any, of undue Catholic power. Rayner, who felt very strongly on this point, acknowledged this might be true in a religious sense but argued that the Catholic question had acquired political and social implications that needed nation-wide attention. He emphasized that he would tolerate no restrictions upon religious freedom, free speech, and the freedom of the press, but felt that within the limitations of the Constitution, the American people had the right and duty of protecting themselves from the danger of papal encroachment.<sup>36</sup>

The party in North Carolina stated its attitude toward ultra-

<sup>36</sup> Greensboro (North Carolina) *Recorder*, October 3, 1855; Raleigh *Tri-Weekly Star*, January 2-23, February 8, 1855.

montane Catholicism in the state platform adopted October 19, 1855, by endorsing "resistance to religious intolerance and a rigid maintenance of the great principle of religious freedom—by excluding from office and power those who would persecute for opinion's sake, who would control the politics of the country through Church influences or priestly interferences, and those who acknowledged any allegiance to any power on earth, whether civil or ecclesiastical, as paramount to that which they owed to the Constitution."

The North Carolina papers substantiated their assertions of the existence of papal temporal claims and designs on America by quoting several rabid Catholic publications and Wesley's letter against the Catholics, but on the whole this point was not pressed to undue lengths. The *Register* printed extracts, taken from the *Baltimore Catholic Mirror*, November 27, 1852, of the "Allocution of Pope Pius IX." Pius had insisted that marriage, for the faithful, outside of the Catholic Church was concubinage. The *Register* asked, ". . . do you feel the wife of your bosom and your children are living in sin?"

The Virginia Americans pursued a policy widely varying from the pro-Catholicism of Louisiana and Maryland. Their officially proclaimed doctrine of religious toleration was against "proscription for proscription's sake." The more radical party organs published severe attacks upon certain aspects of the Catholic Church, past and contemporary. They stated that the increasing numerical strength of the Catholics had enabled them to add, according to their own figures, in the single year of 1854, two new bishops, 139 priests, and 112 churches. These advocates claimed that in Missouri there were some 40,000 members of the Jesuit missions and also some 1,500 members in Kentucky. Texas was credited with being the home of 25,000 Lazarists. It was estimated that current yearly immigration was adding 150,000 new members to the 2,500,000 adherents of the Catholic Church.<sup>37</sup>

The most telling blows against America's adopting of an Old World type of Catholicism were made by printing extracts from various Church organs authenticated by the "imprint" of various bishops. Some favorite extracts were:

<sup>37</sup> Abingdon *Virginian*, July 28, 1855; Richmond *Daily Penny Post*, March 23, April 21, May 10, 1855.



We believe the direct temporal authority of the Pope as Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth.

If the Pope directed the Roman Catholics of this country to overthrow the Constitution, and to annex it as a dependent province of Napoleon . . . they would be bound to obey.

We therefore declare, say and affirm that submission on the part of every man to the Bishop of Rome is altogether necessary for his salvation.

Education ruins happiness: printing ruins the masses.

Most Know-Nothings said they made no war upon any religion or mode of worship, but only upon those who acknowledged temporal allegiance to a "foreign Pope or Prince," and since most Catholics of the United States probably disavowed that allegiance, they held the same party status as members of any other religious denomination.<sup>38</sup>

The Josephine Bunkley fabrication of her "escape" from confinement in a Norfolk convent did not attract attention in Virginia as it did elsewhere, though it furnished material for a few articles.<sup>39</sup>

Thomas S. Flournoy, American candidate for governor in 1857, warned Virginians not to feel that foreigners and Catholics in the state, though few in number, did not constitute a problem. As a leading state in the Union, Virginia must realize that for weal or woe it was her destiny to follow with the Union. He was unable to view with indifference the great Mississippi basin and the Pacific West, capable of sustaining a hundred million people, being filled with foreigners, many of whom were members of the Roman Catholic Church, which was despotic, proscriptive, and intolerant. He added that he would uncompromisingly oppose any legislative enactments against the Catholics, yet through the right of independent individual choice he would attempt to withhold office from them.

J. M. Beale, candidate for lieutenant governor of Virginia, announced that he did not belong to the American Party or any

<sup>38</sup> *Richmond Daily Penny Post*, February 6, 1855, citing *Brownson's Quarterly Review*, October, 1852, 544-48; January, 1853, 57; January, 1854, 94, 106; and the *St. Louis Shepherd of the Valley*, November, 1851, July 6, 1853; *Richmond Enquirer*, February 2, 1855.

<sup>39</sup> *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, December 4, 1854; *Richmond Daily Penny Post*, May 10, 1855.

other secret organization, but that he had always entertained the principles of hostility to easy naturalization and exercise of the suffrage, and the advocacy of the Protestant religion with the right to refuse to vote for Catholics as a natural choice of every citizen.

In September of 1855 there was a severe yellow-fever plague in Portsmouth and Norfolk. Bishop McGill in a sermon at Richmond indirectly attributed this scourge to the Know-Nothings. His statements involved him in a controversy with the Richmond *Whig*. The Bishop in time published his defense. After acknowledging that no one could permeate the councils of God, he continued: "But if I were allowed to divine what sin it is that provoked God's displeasure, I should be *inclined* to designate the *sin* of Knownothingism because holding as I do to the Catholic Church to be divine, and the true Church of Christ, I consider a secret conspiracy organized for its destruction *a sin*, which sooner or later will be vested with God's displeasure—punished by him." <sup>40</sup>

In most of the Southern states, somewhat surprisingly, Methodist periodicals gave aid and comfort to the enemy. Some, such as the New Orleans *Christian Advocate*, warned against intemperate and imprudent advocacy of Protestant principles. As a whole, however, Methodism furnished many members for the new order. The Louisiana Democrats alleged that a Methodist Annual Conference was utilized to initiate the professors of Centenary College and all ministers and circuit riders into the American Party. Likewise in Arkansas it was asserted that the order was spread in the state by Methodist circuit riders.

The Nashville *Christian Advocate* carried only a few articles critical of Catholicism. Claiming to have eschewed politics for years, it defended the freedom of Methodist ministers to speak their minds on a question of right.

In Tennessee a controversy arose between two Methodist ministers, Brownlow and Aaron Brown, over the latter's "Letter to the Bishop, Elders, and other Ministers of the Methodist

<sup>40</sup> W. C. Pendleton, *Political History of Appalachian Virginia* (Dayton, 1927), 206; J. F. Magriz, *The Catholic Church in the City and Diocese of Richmond* (Richmond, 1906), 81.

Church," which had been distributed at an Annual Conference. It attacked Know-Nothingism and advised the Methodist Church to align against it. Brownlow called Brown "an old political hack," and "an intriguing old sinner." A similar controversy regarding the relationship of the Methodists and the Catholics in Americanism received more publicity. This dispute involved the Reverend A. B. Longstreet, president of the University of Mississippi, and William Winans, another prominent Methodist minister. Winans, though not an American, ably held his ground in the series of letters which appeared in the Southern press.<sup>41</sup>

In Virginia, Henry A. Wise took a fling at the Methodists. If America was to have popes he hoped "for God's sake" that she would have one as Italy did, and not a "protestant priest kneeling at Love Feasts." The Richmond *Christian Advocate* protested against certain of the city's Democratic papers, which it named, abusing and trying to frighten the Methodists. It warned its readers that much that was published in the press against the Methodists was calumny for party purposes. The rabidly Protestant editor of the *Advocate* recommended very highly one of the numerous coarse and harsh anti-Catholic works that received large circulation amongst the Protestants of the nation. In a review of *The Great Red Dragon: or, the Master Key to Popery*, which was written by Anthony Gaven, a former Catholic priest at Saragossa, Spain, the editor remarked: "We can conceive of no more certain delusion and disappointment than would befall one who, made sensitive of the need of spiritual regeneration, and seeking remission of his sins, should seek counsel and comfort at the hands of the priesthood of Romanism. Sanity in a madhouse, virtue in a den of lewdness, sanctity in a bandit's cave, are not more improbable than religious truth in a confessional, or piety in cloistered walls."

Many Methodist ministers supported the party in Alabama, though the true religious controversy in that state seemed to be with the Primitive Baptists rather than the Catholics. Some Primitive-Baptist leaders were characterized as "fit instruments in the hands of foreign party leaders to preach Republicanism." The

<sup>41</sup> Letter Book, William Winans Papers, Mississippi State Archives; Natchez *Daily Courier*, February 12 ff., 1856.

Primitive Baptists opposed the Know-Nothings because they were a secret society and bound by oath, the taking of which they strongly condemned.<sup>42</sup>

Southern Baptists, while anti-Catholic, were not universal supporters of Americanism. From Virginia, J. L. M. Curry wrote C. C. Clay, Jr., denouncing Americanism because "to choke up the spontaneous convictions of an immortal soul, is what I fear.—My Baptist principles revolt at anything that militates against individuality of character and the right of private judgment."<sup>43</sup>

In Tennessee the well-known Elder J. R. Graves, exponent of Baptist beliefs and rival of Brownlow, at first supported the tenets of Americanism in his *Tennessee Baptist*. The American candidate for governor in 1855 lost votes in Henderson and Caswell because: "In those communities there are many 'Regular Baptists' who generally are opposed to temperance and secret societies."<sup>44</sup> In Murfreesboro an American speaker was scheduled to speak on temperance in a Methodist church, but since most of the members were Democrats the lecture was transferred to a Baptist church which frequently was used for "educational addresses" on temperance and popery. The Presbyterian papers of the state, the *Memphis Presbyterian Critic*, and the *Nashville Banner of Peace and Cumberland Presbyterian Advocate*, vigorously expounded Know-Nothingism.

Throughout the life of the party, though frequent fears of infidelism were expressed, the only religion other than Catholicism actually criticized was Judaism and then in the most rare and isolated instances. The *Item* of Fort Adams, Mississippi, charged that Jews were taking Louisiana by swindling whites and Negroes alike; and instead of driving these "avaricious Shylocks" out of the country as they deserved, the "model democracy" of Louisiana had nominated a certain Jew, E. W. Moise, for attorney general. The editor had also been much incensed over an incident at Percy's Creek, Mississippi, which involved a Jew and an attack upon a "native American."

Thus it can be seen that the national ritual, state rituals, party

<sup>42</sup> Dorman, *Party Politics in Alabama*, 110-11; Greensboro *Alabama Beacon*, May 18, June 1, 1855.

<sup>43</sup> J. L. M. Curry to C. C. Clay, Jr., June 30, 1854, Clay Papers.

<sup>44</sup> John Campbell to David Campbell, July 5, 1855, Campbell Papers.

platforms, and individual practices and interpretations relative to Catholicism varied widely. The order appealed to those Protestants whose inheritance and education tended to make them distrustful of ultramontane Catholicism, as well as to certain bigoted Protestants who saw little but evil in "Popery." However, the movement also attracted appreciable numbers of orthodox Roman Catholics—including a few priestly advocates. Only to a limited and qualified extent could the party be labelled as anti-Catholic.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### BLOODSHED AND VIOLENCE

**D**URING THE period in which the American Party was a participant in the Southern political arena, violence and intimidation of voters at the polls were accepted in many parts of the United States as normal incidents. In the slave states the larger cities, particularly St. Louis, Baltimore, and New Orleans, had extended experiences of lawlessness and brutality as practiced by spontaneously gathered mobs or by rival organizations of fire companies and neighborhood gangs. Wherever there were concentrations of Irish, brawls were frequent. Motivated by drunkenness, their passions aroused by political contests or fired by sheer joy of physical combat, groups shot, stabbed, clubbed, and mutilated their opponents, who a few days later might be fellow compatriots in renewed violence against other antagonists.

The Americans often received the full opprobrium for such disturbances as occurred during their lifetime and indubitably deserved some condemnation; more often they were participants in, not instigators of, violence. Especially should it be noted that there was no inciting to mob action against Catholic institutions that had so characterized nativism before the rise of Americanism. It is noteworthy that in St. Louis, differing markedly from Baltimore and New Orleans, there was a distinct lessening, almost a cessation, of political rowdyism during the period of Know-Nothingism.

Seldom in the smaller towns and rural communities were force and intimation practiced; only where there were concentrated larger numbers of foreigners, particularly Baltimore, New Orleans, and Louisville, were the Americans embroiled in extended

and bloody election riots. Responsibility for these riots was assigned to the Democrats by the Americans and to the Americans by the Democrats.

The man who adopted politics as an avocation in the cities of Louisville, Baltimore, and New Orleans in the decade before the Civil War would find himself engaged in no parlor game played decorously. Brutal gangs of ruffians who did not normally hesitate to terrorize peaceful citizens felt that political contests gave them special license to pursue helpless individuals, intimidate them by beatings, stabbings, shootings, by the burning of their homes, by ducking them in tubs of blood, or even shooting cannon in their direction. As the foreign element in these cities was one of the chief components of the lawless groups, native-born citizens were the particular recipients of their ire. However, Germans and Irish were not the only contributors toward rowdiness. Native-born Americans of the lower ranks, in exuberant combat, often seized brickbat and club and joyously advanced to the fray.

There were five major election riots in New Orleans during the lifetime of the Americans, two in 1854, and one each in 1855, 1856, and 1858. The first riot in March of 1854 was occasioned by the casting of 750 more Democratic votes in one precinct than were registered. Such Democratic plural voting resulted in several killings. A number of ballot boxes were destroyed amidst general rowdiness.

In September occurred another riot much larger and more bloody. In the lower dives and coffeehouses of the city the rougher elements congregated. Under the influence of liquor they accepted fanciful stories that the Know-Nothings intended to slaughter the Catholics. Arms were distributed and passions inflamed. On Saturday, September 9, 1854, three respectable citizens passing by a coffeehouse were greeted by the yell, "A hundred dollars for the head of a Know Nothing." After a few insulting remarks, about twenty men started firing. The three citizens escaped with slight wounds. The same night a minor city judge was attacked while he was trying to disband 150 armed men he had found on the street. Before he could be rescued by the police, four men were wounded and one was killed. The civil power seemed utterly paralyzed. The weak and vacillating mayor took

few precautions throughout the week of rioting and inefficiently used the city police and militia to regain order.

The police force was naturally partisan. The first district police force was five-sixths foreign born; twenty-five were German, ninety-eight Irish, two English, and twenty-five American. The second district had enrolled twenty-seven Germans, forty-four Irish, fifty Americans, twenty French, and twenty-seven Spaniards. The other districts were similarly proportioned. For some months, control of the police had been a bone of contention between the mayor and council.

Sunday the tenth was comparatively quiet, but on the following evening armed bands congregated on St. Mary's Market and Lafayette Square. The mayor went to a large crowd of Irishmen, told them that the other group did not contemplate making any attack, and asked them to disperse. Their leader, a Captain Cavanaugh, assented; but a druggist, Dr. J. J. Meighan, stepped forward, armed with a gun and saber, and refused. A report spread that the Know-Nothings were marching to destroy Saint Patrick's Church. Dr. Meighan led two hundred armed Irishmen down Camp Street to defend it and, upon meeting a party of men coming up the street, opened fire. A general fight resulted in the death of two men and the wounding of many others.

The next night the excitement was still at a high heat. The militia was kept in line until eleven o'clock. Pistol shots having been discharged from a coffeehouse on Levee Street, a mob of a hundred attacked it and chased one innocent man down the street, caught and shot him. Scenes of violence among individuals continued during the remaining five days of the week, and occasionally deaths resulted. Citizens deputized by the mayor patrolled the streets and by Monday, September 18, the town was more quiet.<sup>1</sup>

Before the fall election of 1855 in New Orleans there arose a serious controversy over the legality of the naturalizations which the courts of that city sanctioned. The old rush to crowd new citizens through the naturalization "mill" was repeated. The First and Fourth District courts naturalized eighty-six persons on one day, November 3, 1855. The courts remained open on All Saints'

<sup>1</sup> New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, September 12-19, 1854.



Day, a holiday of importance to Catholics, for the first time on record so that the number of voters might be increased. The dispute which arose was a question of conflict between the state constitution which gave certain courts located in New Orleans the right to hear only specific types of cases at certain times of the year, and the Federal naturalization law which granted certain courts the additional power of naturalization. State courts of original jurisdiction were granted the power of naturalization by Federal law, yet the state of Louisiana had assigned certain courts jurisdiction only in criminal cases. The Know-Nothings claimed that naturalization was not criminal procedure and therefore papers granted by such a court were invalid. The question of whether the court could sit in legal session during the summer was also disputed.<sup>2</sup>

The Democratic Central Committee proposed to the American Central Committee that the question be settled in accordance with the opinions of a group of lawyers. The American Party desired a conference to help draft the questions to be submitted to them. The Democrats ignored this proposition as they had selected lawyers upon whom they could depend. The Americans decided to acquiesce, but the Democrats had already rushed into print and said that the Know-Nothings would not co-operate and were determined to make trouble. Both parties consulted prominent lawyers and each heard what they wanted to hear.<sup>3</sup> The question came to the polls unsettled. The Americans asserted that each commissioner had sworn that he would uphold the law and prevent fraud, and he should therefore judge the validity of the votes. They said that each commissioner would be committing a moral crime if he permitted votes to be cast upon papers which he believed to be illegally granted by an unauthorized court.

On election day the majority of the electorate came to the polls armed with pistols and bowie knives, the toughs because they liked to fight and intended to vote regardless of their right to do so, respectable citizens because their lives and rights were endangered. The Americans came armed "to protect the ballot boxes," but the Democrats accused them of preventing as many

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, October 6, 15, 17, November 1, 1855.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*; Baton Rouge *Weekly Comet*, October 21, 1855.

Democrats as possible from voting. Several casualties resulted. One man was killed when he tried to force his vote by approaching the polls with his naturalization papers in one hand and a pistol in the other. The only approaches to polls located in inclosed courts were by narrow alleys. Such small and cramped quarters led to jostlings, which in turn led to personal encounters. At such a precinct a man of foreign extraction often had a hard time even reaching the polls. At one place a man was stationed on a scantling so he could look over into the polls to see which way the vote was cast. If it was unfavorable to the Know-Nothings he would cry "initiate him!" and as the man emerged he would be beaten until he escaped.<sup>4</sup>

Whenever possible the Know-Nothing commissioners refused to recognize those naturalization papers which they believed to be illegally granted. The Democrats then used protest boxes and slips which they had printed before the election. The Know-Nothing commissioners refused to recognize their validity as the law did not provide for any such boxes. Much fraud was committed on both sides. The Democrats, being in a minority, used any means possible to gain a vote. The Know-Nothings were just as determined that these votes should not be cast, especially by foreign voters recently naturalized. The cry "Clear the polls, you damned Dutch and Irish Sons of Bitches!" was often heard.

On election night while the votes were still being counted, a mob gathered before the Ninth Precinct poll and destroyed the ballot box. An hour later the ballots of the Seventh Precinct were seized and scattered to the winds. Both of the polls would probably have given Democratic majorities and influenced the results greatly. The American commissioners of each of these polls, William Christy and C. H. Horton, refused to make returns even after a writ of mandamus had been issued ordering them to do so. They said that the votes had not been counted and to make a sworn return of results would be perjury.

Immediately after the state election of 1855 the Democrats proceeded to contest it by entering suits at all possible places throughout the state. The New Orleans frauds and riots in which

<sup>4</sup> *Baton Rouge Weekly Comet*, November 8, 1855; *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, November 7, 1855; *Report of the Committee on Elections, Majority Report* (Louisiana), 29.

they themselves had played a leading part gave the Democrats a splendid opportunity to attack the Americans. The case of the Democratic contestant, J. M. Bell, who attempted to oust the newly elected American, Sheriff Joseph Hufty, was long and bitter.

The law conferred exclusive jurisdiction in contested elections on the First District Court, but the Democrats preferred to bring action before a sympathetic judge. Bell therefore brought suit before Judge John Blackstone Cotton for a writ of mandamus to compel the American commissioners to make returns from polls where votes had been destroyed. Judah P. Benjamin pleaded for Bell, while Hufty's interests were represented by Randell Hunt.<sup>5</sup> When the commissioners refused to make false returns they were imprisoned and fined. Bell then brought his case before the First District Court, where both sides claimed fraud. A judge and jury of twelve men decided that Hufty had been legally elected and increased his majority 9 votes. After this decision the governor issued him a commission.

But Hufty was not allowed to keep the office, for the next Democratic legislature consolidated the power of the state into their own hands. They adopted a partisan address to Governor W. C. Wickliffe to remove Hufty from office. The governor commissioned J. M. Bell sheriff, but Hufty refused to give up the office on the ground that his removal was unconstitutional. In spite of Bell's efforts to obtain writs of mandamus to oust him, he kept the office until the Supreme Court gave it to the Democratic contestant. So high was the feeling aroused that the judge carried a pair of pistols and a bowie knife, which he attempted to use upon a recalcitrant deputy who had refused to arrest Hufty. The question at issue did not turn upon the legality of the election, for that had been decided in Hufty's favor in the first trial, but upon the removal power of the legislature.<sup>6</sup>

One of the most spectacular cases was *W. C. Auld vs. J. B. Walton* for the clerkship of the Fourth District Court. Randell

<sup>5</sup> New Orleans, *Daily Crescent*, November 14, 28, 1855.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, November 10, December 17, 1855, February 18-25, April 19, 1856; Baton Rouge *Sugar Planter*, November 1, 1855; Dart, *John Blackstone Cotton, 1824-1881*, 12; *Journal of the House of Representatives* (Louisiana), 1856, pp. 27, 28; Washington *National Intelligencer*, April 10, 1856.

Hunt and L. Madison Day were the counsels for the American elect, Walton. Hunt summed up the evidence in a brilliant speech lasting three and one-half hours. He said that 122 of the witnesses did not know who the candidates for the clerkship were, 106 had never read the Constitution, 20 had attempted to vote upon incomplete naturalization papers, 28 had tried to vote at the wrong precincts, and one offered to vote without knowing the candidates, and had signed a protest without knowing what he was signing. By a vote of 7 to 5 the jury awarded Walton the office to which he had been elected six months before, although the Supreme Court later reversed the decision. Most of the other cases were quietly dropped.

The two hundred witnesses called in this trial were those who had voted the Democratic protest slips. From day to day the *Crescent* printed their sworn testimony under the caption "The Black Record." It was indeed a black record for the Democrats. Many witnesses were not over eighteen, yet they had been "naturalized." Numbers had obtained papers just before the election—sixty-nine at one court, sixty-one at another. Other naturalized citizens could not produce papers at all. Three witnesses had never appeared in court to ask naturalization, but had had their papers brought to their homes, one without previous knowledge that he was an applicant for naturalization. Twenty-odd had only incomplete papers. There were forty-seven who had signed the protests without reading them; some had signed them after their ballots had been accepted. Know-Nothing commissioners justified their rejection of legal votes on the grounds that the situation was rotten and decadent.<sup>7</sup>

In his message to the legislature in January, 1856, the governor discussed at length the "scenes of intimidation, violence and bloodshed which marked the late general election in the city of New Orleans." To him "it was an obvious duty to the honor of the state and of our republican institutions to prevent the repetition of outrages which tarnish our national character and sink us to the level of the anarchial governments of Spanish America."

The Democratic lower house appointed a committee on contested elections which was immediately swamped with "evidence"

<sup>7</sup> New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, February 6, May 19-June 4, 1856.

of fraud. The Know-Nothings objected very strongly to the consideration of much of it. They contended the evidence was *ex parte*, for a great deal of it had been gathered without notice being given to the contestants or without their being allowed to be present. Upon the recommendation of the majority of the committee, by a strict party vote, several seats were declared vacant. The representative from the parish of St. Helena was re-elected without opposition. The Americans were equally as successful in several other parishes where local elections were contested.

The senate's action was even more summary. On January 25, 1856, it decided by a vote of 16 to 10 to vacate the seats of three contested senators. The Americans fought every step to no avail. The correspondent of the *Crescent* said: "Messrs. Editors, the blood fairly curdled in my veins when I saw the Senator from Rapides, a foreigner by birth, the especial champion of the Anti-American party, expounding American law to American Senators, on the trial of three honorable native born Americans."

The Democratic majority of the committee on contested elections summoned witnesses but denied that privilege to the minority, who complained "that they had not even been permitted to examine the report of the majority, or the testimony upon which that report was based, until a few minutes before the matter was submitted to the Senate—that they had asked not only as a right, but as an act of courtesy from the majority the privilege of a few hours examination, at least, of their report and testimony, which request was refused as was said, not from motives of discourtesy, but for political reasons."

The majority report of the house committee on contested elections charged that gangs of armed desperadoes systematically attempted to terrorize those who wished to vote the opposition ticket in New Orleans. It claimed that hundreds of voters had been refused admittance to the polls and assumed that therefore their votes should be counted for the Democratic candidate. The minority report protested that most of the evidence was taken before the candidates were notified and that the judges who took it were not qualified. It denied that all the disqualified voters had legal suffrage rights, showed that some had desired to vote the American ticket but were refused, and protested against the as-

sumption that these votes entitled the Democratic candidates to office.

In the 1856 spring election for city officials, both parties were responsible for an outburst of rioting and violence at the polls. The Americans asserted that the real responsibility "of the onus of riotings at the polls lies with those who *commenced* the difficulties. *They* are the real authors of the disturbances. . . . If you strike at a man in the street, that man, if he is not a white livered poltroon—will strike back, may pursue and whip his assailant—may in the furious excitement engendered by an intolerable outrage, draw weapons and take life. These acts are all contrary to law. Yet would public sentiment stigmatize and punish the insulted individual as a ruffian and a murderer, and hold the other of the affray harmless?"

Democratic papers, especially those of New Orleans, seldom published an issue without stating that Know-Nothings were murderers, thieves, thugs, orphan killers, brass knucklers, midnight assassins, widow-makers, rowdies, bullies, plug-uglies, drunkards, house burners, dark-lantern men, ballot-box breakers, and rioters. They charged that since the rise of the Americans no free election had been held in New Orleans and that the Americans could only win an election by brute force, murder, and corruption. All this the American papers, ably led by the *Crescent*, denied vehemently.<sup>8</sup>

The governor attempted by proclamation to place the sole control of peace and order in New Orleans during the election upon the sheriff, but the mayor answered that it was his sworn duty to see that peace was kept and scoffed at the governor's threat to set aside the New Orleans vote under certain circumstances. Just a few days before the election the mayor ordered the office of the *Courier*, the leading Democratic paper, to be searched for pistols and guns. A large quantity were found and seized. The Americans claimed that these were to arm rioters to attack the polls. The *Courier* maintained that they were for defense only. Upon sworn affidavits the Charity Hospital was also searched—

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, January 22-29, February 15, 16, March 17, 20, 1856; *Journal of the House of Representatives* (Louisiana), 1856, pp. 14-21; *Report of the Committee on Elections* (Louisiana), *passim*; *Baton Rouge Weekly Morning Comet*, June 4, 1856.

fruitlessly. As this institution was run by Catholic sisters, the Democrats immediately circulated wild stories about discourtesy and rudeness to the nuns.<sup>9</sup>

The election itself in New Orleans was much quieter than usual, although this did not mean that there was a reign of peace.

Before the municipal election of 1858 the "Independent" Party, which formed the only political opposition to the Americans in New Orleans, issued several notices offering to protect peaceful citizens in their right to vote, and calling upon citizens to enroll and form armed squads to march to and from the polls. The Americans immediately countered with similar proclamations.

On the last day for the registering of voters, June 2, 1858, there occurred a trivial difficulty at the registration booths. The Independents seized upon this as an excuse, and, at three o'clock the next morning, two hundred armed men seized a state arsenal. The "Vigilantes," as they called themselves, thus provided with arms, ammunition, and cannon, encamped in Jackson Square. They seized the "lock-up," police headquarters, and the courtroom of the Sixth District and posted guards to keep all people out. "The Vigilante Committee" announced in the *Courier* that: "Having resolved to free our city of the murderers who infest it, we have assumed its temporary government. . . . and shall not lay down arms until this is effected."

Mayor Charles M. Waterman convened the city council in secret session and was given full power to handle the situation. He personally attempted to get the Vigilantes to surrender, but their commander, Captain L. Duncan, superintendent of the United States Marine Hospital, refused, demanding that all his men should be sworn in as part of the election force. By this time the number of men in the camp had greatly increased. The Washington Artillery, the Southern Rifles, and the National and Continental Guards had been ordered by state commanding officers to stand ready. Hundreds of citizens, who had gathered arms and started drilling in military formations, stood ready to attack if the mayor ordered.

The Vigilantes encamped in true military style:

<sup>9</sup> New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, November 3, 9-14, 1856.

. . . the arsenal building crowded with men, all wearing intelligent countenances and a determined air, while the minie muskets are being brought out and stacked conveniently for instant use; the brass twelve pounder ready for dreadful deeds, with its mouth pointing so as to sweep Chartres Street, down to Canal with grape, and the gunners with their ammunition beside it; the cordon of sentinels (in citizen dress but each armed with a minie musket) extending completely around Jackson Square, with the dense throngs of inquisitive persons pressing up against the line of sentinels, all tending to give it a look of anything but a peaceable city.

The citizens of New Orleans could not understand the vacillating course of the mayor. Several thousand of them were under arms, and with the aid of the militia the seven or eight hundred Vigilantes could have been swamped. The Vigilantes were chiefly Irish and foreigners. The friends of these men paraded and held turbulent meetings under the name of "Irish Gallatin Boys." The order to the state troops to assemble was revoked, and the citizens waited in vain for leaders.

For some reason the mayor decided that his person was safer within the camp of the Vigilantes than in the city, and he made his headquarters there. On June 5 he called the chief of police into the camp and gave him instructions as to the conduct of his subordinates. The chief said he was unable to handle them as they were not on their beats or reporting to the office, but merely wandering around at their own pleasure. The mayor then acceded to the demands of the Vigilantes; he and the inspector of elections, J. L. Lewis, commissioned them in a body as special-elections police, guaranteed them from molestation for their actions, and permitted them to remain in camp until they were sworn in. The Vigilantes pledged themselves to attend the polls and protect every legal voter and to seize and punish any offender against law and order.

The mayor then announced that the matter had been settled satisfactorily to both sides and requested the citizens to lay down their arms. Some disappointed and bloodthirsty men started to drag their six cannon toward the "enemy" preparatory to starting a fight, but cooler heads prevailed.



That afternoon a commission of men obtained permission from the Vigilantes to see the mayor. From him they obtained a written authorization to swear in citizens as special policemen, and some two thousand were deputized, although in the evening he revoked this authority. The council drew up articles of impeachment of Mayor Waterman and declared a mayor pro tempore. Waterman then asked to be allowed to come to the upper part of the town. He was conducted to the St. Charles Hotel where the crowd promised not to harm him.

The night of June 5 both "camps" sent out scouting parties to prevent surprise attacks which both expected. These patrols met several times but no blood was shed, although each side "arrested" several persons as "spies." About two o'clock one Vigilante patrol returned by a different route from that which they were supposed to take. The guards mistook their compatriots for the "enemy" and shot off the cannon that commanded the street and killed four and seriously wounded eight of the party. The political character of the Vigilantes is shown by the fact that of the eight wounded by the grapeshot, three were Irish, two were German, and one was Swiss.

Sunday, June 6, both sides continued to hold their respective forts, three quarters of a mile apart, the Vigilantes at Jackson Square, the citizens at Lafayette Square. The Mayor pro tempore ordered the Vigilantes to disband but he was ignored. The regular chief of police, influenced by a three-thousand-dollar bribe, the Americans claimed, had left the city. A new police force was organized and put on the beats to keep down robbery, scattered shooting, and disorder. Such a force was badly needed, for one murderer had been caught in the act, but no police could be found in the city to jail him. The arrival of fifty-two Federal soldiers from Baton Rouge to protect the mint and customs occasioned some excitement at first. It was feared that they had come to reinforce the Vigilantes.

The morning of election day, June 7, found both sides continuing to hold their camps. Two hundred Vigilantes marched from poll to poll during the day, but the election was peaceful and quiet. In the evening the citizens broke up their camp and returned home. That night the Vigilantes abandoned huge piles of

food, bedding, and most of the rifles, bayonets, and pistols, which had been stolen from the arsenal. Many were afraid that some action would be taken against them and left the city for "health trips." A few foreigners fled to the marshes, where they hid until forced back by hunger.<sup>10</sup>

As in New Orleans, elections in Baltimore frequently included fighting, bloodshed, and roughness, though perhaps the groups who participated were not as fully organized. Then again the Americans in control of the Maryland legislature were not as subject to reprisals as were Louisianians. In the first election in which the new party participated, in the fall of 1854, there was violence, although in the general election held in the following autumn only good humor prevailed. A week later, riots occurred at a special contest in the Nineteenth Ward, where the victorious Democrat of the previous week had died. The toughs of both parties from all over the city congregated around a polling booth where a wooden fence made a lane. The unruly crowd of some 2,000 persons pushed the fence down and so crowded the approaches that voters were deterred from balloting. After such an initial repulse a small group of Democrats led by Patsy Naff, Hugh Davey, Country Thompson, and William Starr returned with reinforcements and, in attempting to force a path down the city street, became involved in an altercation. Thompson was beaten. Naff fired his gun and for this was held in custody by the police for a few hours. A German who was sought on similar charges was extracted from a German beer house which had been turned into a miniature fort. He was shot in the back while in police custody. Thugs of both parties came armed with pistols and dirks. Roughness, pushing, threats, and drunkenness led to bloodshed.<sup>11</sup>

The Baltimore mayoralty campaign of 1856 aroused more interest than the presidential contest. On September 2 the Rip Rap Club and the Wamponag Club marched by platoons with cartloads of bricks to a prearranged combat. Pistols were also used.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, June 4 ff., 1858; *Baton Rouge Weekly Gazette and Comet*, June 3, 4, 1858; *Baton Rouge Sugar Planter*, June 12, 1858. The judge of the trial court was assaulted the next morning when he attempted to gain admittance to his courtroom.

<sup>11</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, October 20, November 19, 1855; *Baltimore Patriot*, October 19-23, 1855.

One person was killed, and twenty wounded. This encounter was not occasioned by political rivalry, for each was an American club. A few days later they were both marching together to an American meeting when some boys threw bricks at their ranks. On the return march a riot occurred in which one was killed and twenty-one injured. Only one participant was arrested, and he on a charge of giving powder to one of the rioters! On October 4 an altercation began when Democratic toughs attacked one of the headquarters of the Know-Nothings and hauled down the Fillmore and Donelson flags. Pistols were drawn and for a while serious bloodshed seemed inevitable. This latter episode was only one of the many in which Democrats were accused of importing New York and Philadelphia thugs.<sup>12</sup>

The day of balloting, and especially the days following, were marred by riots. The character of those participating can be drawn from the names of the political clubs sponsored by both parties. The American clubs were the Rip Raps, Plug Uglies, Black Snakes, Tigers, Rough Skins, Red Necks, Thunder Bolts, Gladiators, Ranters, Eubolts, Little Fellows, Ashlanders, Screw Bolts, Junior Mount Clares, Stay Lates, Hard Times, Dips, Wamponags, and Blood Tubs. The Blood Tubs received their name from having brought a tub of blood from a slaughter house to daub on foreign voters. They occasionally held a victim by the heels and soused him headfirst into the tub.

The Democratic clubs were known as Bloody Eights, Double Pumps, Calithumpians, Ferry Road Hunters, Gumballs, Peelers, Pluckers, Shad Hoes, Bloats, Eighth Ward Black Guards, and Butt Enders. The various fire companies also had political allegiances.

One riot on election day saw the Plug Uglies and the Rip Raps arrayed against the New Market Fire Company. For three hours guerrilla warfare was carried on. Over two hundred shots were fired from muskets, shotguns, and pistols, forcing residents to flee for their lives. In the Eighth Ward the Democrats soundly thumped their opponents, who, obtaining aid from other parts of the city, retaliated. For blocks up and down Monument Street the struggle was fought, trees, stoops, doorways giving conceal-

<sup>12</sup> Baltimore *Patriot*, October 6, 1856; Baltimore *Sun*, September 20, 1856.

ment and protection for gunfire. In all, four men were killed and fifty-three wounded.

In the following month a more serious riot occurred at the polls. In two wards alone, 8 were killed and 150 wounded, many of these being young boys 15 to 18 years of age. Open battles were fought up and down High, Exter, Stiles, and Eastern avenues. Pistols and muskets fired singly and in volleys as rival forts bristled with brass cannons, the Democrats in the Market House, the Know-Nothings in the Fish Market. The police captured one cannon but were unable to restore order for several hours even though twenty-five reserves were summoned. Even peaceful citizens, residing far from the scenes of battle, were not unmolested. Reverdy Johnson was fired upon in his home as he sat reading his paper.<sup>13</sup>

Governor T. W. Ligon blamed the Americans for the rioting. This was unjust as the fault lay in local conditions which had existed for years and in the poor police system. In Mayor Thomas Swann's inauguration speech he announced plans for a new police system. Before, there had been only one uniformed policeman on duty in each ward during the day. At night there were varying numbers of "night watchmen." Under the new police regulations a regular system of officers with adequate supervision and personnel was provided with a yearly budget of \$150,000.

During his first year in office Mayor Swann warned the city council that the city police were helpless to enforce order with the confusion that existed and warned that when those who were arrested were not sentenced by the courts, they were only emboldened to further lawlessness. Baltimore had no laws at this time against the carrying of concealed weapons.

Some action was taken by the Americans in the city council to strengthen the powers of the police. Much stricter laws on vagrancy were passed and appeals from this charge forbidden. Formerly, vagrants had transferred their cases to the County Court where dismissal charges were sure. The police force were given uniforms for the first time, and their numbers and discipline increased. The new reforms took time, and, as many of the older

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, November 12, 1856; Scharf, *The Chronicles of Baltimore*, 550-52; *Baltimore Sun*, November 8, 1856.

employees still kept their jobs, morale was slow in improving. Some 100 officers by day and 200 by night were to keep order in this city of 250,000. These officers had their hands full when election day came, even with some 400 reserves.<sup>14</sup>

In the municipal elections in the fall of 1857 in those districts where the Americans had control, naturalized citizens voted only at great physical peril. In those inhabited by foreigners, native Americans could not approach the polls unless they were known to be Democrats. Both sides were heavily armed. The police captured cannons and rifles and seized ammunition from regularly established arsenals and forts. Thirty muskets were seized from the New Market (Fire) Engine House. One officer was killed while attempting to quell a riot started by the Democrats in the Eighth Ward. Several were injured protecting a Democratic headquarters from a Know-Nothing mob. The Americans blamed the Democrats for inciting riot, while the Democrats laid all the responsibility on the Americans. Mayor Swann attributed the disorder to the grogshops, where political arguments waxed hot.

At the polls the Americans carried the day 11,898 to 2,792, a majority of 9,106 votes. In Ward Twenty the Democrats officially tallied only 1 vote, in the Eleventh, Fourteenth, and Seventeenth, they polled 2, 8, and 10, respectively.

Governor T. W. Ligon as a Democrat saw an opportunity to use his office to further the interests of his party under the guise of duty. On October 27 he visited Baltimore. From there he wrote Mayor Thomas Swann asking what arrangements had been made to prevent repetition of disorder in the city in the coming state election. He requested that Swann consult with him so that he might personally take action. Swann denied that Governor Ligon had any power to intervene unless asked, and he stated that he had made strenuous efforts to prevent lawlessness and that he had largely succeeded. Ligon then issued a proclamation warning the citizens that he had assumed charge and would call out the state militia to keep order.

<sup>14</sup> *Baltimore Patriot*, January 19, February 15, 1856, March 18, 25, 1857; *Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, January 20, 1857. The new uniforms of the police made them conspicuous and the objects of a number of brutal assaults by hoodlums.

The Americans were incensed by Ligon's threatened martial law, denouncing the plan as "high handed action, and despotism." Both the Americans and Democrats obtained opinions from prominent judges and lawyers of the state on the legality of the governor's intervention. Some of these opinions ran into thousands of words. Both claimants held that the weight of evidence favored them. Among those consulted were Reverdy Johnson, John Nelson, R. N. Martin, J. L. McMahon, C. F. Mayer, I. N. Steele, L. W. Brine, J. M. Campbell, S. T. Wallis, J. Meredith, William Price, and T. S. Alexander.<sup>15</sup>

Swann issued a proclamation placing the police under order of the judges of elections. He ordered the arrest or detention of all disorderly, intoxicated persons, all those carrying arms, intimidating voters, and all those who refused to close their saloons on election day. Governor Ligon then declared that he was satisfied with Swann's arrangements and promised not to use the militia.

National election day, November 4, while not as bloody as the previous municipal election, followed a similar pattern, and many citizens, both Democratic and American, were deprived of their right to vote. Either through fear or inability the police gave little protection to electors in many precincts. The Americans printed a thin red stripe down the back of their ballots and prevented those with unmarked ballots from approaching the polls. Crowds were warned to clear the way around the booths when American voters appeared and to close up against Democratic supporters. Near some of the polls were arranged a few buckets of blood into which were dipped those who insisted upon voting for Democrats. In order to "persuade" Democrats to move away, shoe-makers' awls were occasionally used. Where Democrats had control, as in the Eighth Ward, outright intimidation was also practiced. In this ward they cast almost double the vote of 1860, when party feeling was lower and less cramming of the boxes was practiced.

One alarm was turned in stating that hoodlums were throwing bricks through the windows of the Church of the Immaculate Conception. The Americans claimed that the bricks were thrown

<sup>15</sup> Baltimore *Patriot*, October 20, November 2, 1857.

by Democrats to bring disrepute on the Americans. They offered the mayor their services as guards for this church.<sup>16</sup>

The following year just before the polls opened, the police in a series of raids seized quantities of arms and ammunition, and also a cannon or so.

An indication of incitement to violence can be seen in the circumstances surrounding a huge mass meeting held before the fall election of 1859 in Baltimore with Henry Winter Davis as the principal speaker. The *Baltimore Clipper* described the parade preceding the speeches and particularly the transparencies used.

Some of them were the usual characters on election transparencies; some were humorous and some were threatening; the prevailing figure was of a man running, with another in pursuit, sticking him with an awl. There was another figure of a bleeding head, with the device, "The Head of a Reformer."

There was another of an uplifted arm with a clenched fist, with the device "With This We'll Do The Work." One of the parties on horseback, with a ribbon around him, carried a large awl strapped to his back. A party from the 18th Ward had a forge with fire, and persons hammering, apparently making awls.

The election followed the line indicated. Awls were used and violence resorted to. Sworn testimony revealed the revival of the practice of cooping. One man related his experiences in court. After drinking at an inn he started home. He was seized on a dark street and dragged into a house where, with several others, he was shut up in a room. One of his companions made so much noise that four men entered and beat the man until he was unconscious. All captives were stripped of their clothing, arms, and money and then marched into the cellar. Here they were kept for several days with new arrivals coming regularly. Finally there were seventy men cooped in this one cellar, with the same number in an upstairs room. On election day the man who related the experi-

<sup>16</sup> W. S. Myers, "Know Nothing [*sic*] and Ku Klux Klan," in *North American Review*, CCIX (January, 1924), 5; Scharf, *Chronicles of Baltimore*, 550-551; *Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, November 3, 1857.

ence was voted sixteen times by the Americans, being carried with two or three others in carriages to various polls. Between polls he was taken to other coops and forced to change clothing. Democrats likewise resorted to force or fraud but could not cope with American numbers. Several citizens lost their lives; numbers were bruised and injured.

Unlike Baltimore and New Orleans, political violence seldom marred Louisville elections, but the riots which occurred in the city on election day of August, 1855, were worthy of the title by which they became known, "Bloody Monday." Weeks in advance of the election Democratic political leaders roused the fears and ire of Irish Catholics of the community by a campaign of intemperate defamation of the character and intentions of the American Party. One result was a rush of repair work in the gunsmith shops of the foreign sections. The Irish were known to have been purchasing arms for some weeks before the election. In one house which was burned, thirteen kegs of powder were heard to explode. A few of the more sober Democrats wished to take preventive measures before the polls opened, but nothing was done.

Election morning found the Americans, fortified by free liquor issued the night before, in full control of the polling booths in all wards except the First and Eighth. Here attempts were made to prevent Know-Nothings from balloting. In several wards the Know-Nothings gathered in such numbers that access to the polls was virtually impossible. Privileged voters were passed on over the heads of the crowd. Any man who failed to show a yellow card in his hat band or possess a yellow voting ballot was refused admittance. If the prospective Democratic voter was of foreign extraction, disfranchisement was often accompanied by a compulsory gauntlet-running where sticks, stones, and gun butts were applied. Even native-born gray hairs were not protection, for former Whig Congressman William Thommason was beaten.

All violence was not confined to the polls. Any person appearing on the streets was liable to find himself shot, beaten, stabbed, or with his throat cut. Even men in buggies with their wives were fired upon. Know-Nothing roughness seemed during the early morning to be largely in the vicinity of the polling booths, but when certain foreigners in the Democratic Party fired upon per-



sons in the streets, pitched battles broke out. Foreigners suffered more than the natives in the riots because they had attempted to fortify themselves in the houses along the main streets in order to keep Americans from passing to the polls. When these houses were set on fire to smoke out the snipers, several perished in the flames.

In all, fourteen houses were burned, mostly the property of an Irish "ruffian" by the name of Patrick O'Quinn, whose body was partially consumed in one of the fires. It was estimated that the disturbances took the lives of twenty-two persons, of whom three fourths were foreigners. The number of injured must have been correspondingly high. A Catholic church was saved and the violence quelled by the intercession of prominent American and Democratic civic leaders, with the support of energetic police action.

When the Right Reverend Bishop Martin J. Spaulding issued a notice to the Catholics of the city after the riots, certain citizens became offended, and for several days it appeared that lawlessness would break forth again.<sup>17</sup>

On the following days partisan editors devoted pages to testimonials exonerating themselves and casting responsibility upon their opponents. Leaders of both parties undoubtedly were directly responsible for certain phases: the Democrats for promotion and initiation of the first gunfire; the Americans for allowing the disturbances to reach such sanguinary heights. An analysis of the number of votes cast in the city's eight wards in the national election of 1852 and in the city election of 1855 clearly demonstrates that nearly 50 per cent of the 1852 Democratic vote had disappeared by the later date, perhaps because of intimidation. Only 2 votes were recorded in the Second Ward where there had been 279 three years previously. American strength was only slightly greater than had been that of the Whigs.

At Covington, Kentucky, in May of 1856 there occurred a different type of violence between natives and foreigners.<sup>18</sup> Here a contingent of the German athletic and fraternal organization,

<sup>17</sup> William Winans to W. D. Winans, December 4, 1855, Winans Papers; *Baltimore Sun*, August 11, 1855, quoting the *Louisville Courier* and *Louisville Journal*; *Frankfort Commonwealth*, August 14, 1855.

<sup>18</sup> *Frankfort Commonwealth*, May 20, 1856.

the Turners, came for a picnic, marching in military formation and armed with rifles. A number of town boys hung around and made general nuisances of themselves. One of them grabbed a Turner's mug of beer and received a blow on the mouth. His companions fled to town to circulate tales that the foreign atheistic Dutch were killing native boys. A mob gathered and, accompanied by the sheriff, approached the picnic grounds. There a Turner mistakenly shot the peace officer. Townspeople were held at bay by fixed bayonets. The Turners surrendered several members to the police but refused to disarm.

A somewhat similar incident had occurred in Mississippi on July 4, 1854, when the Natchez German Turner Society was stoned as it was returning from an outing. The Turners insisted that they had no political implications and had banded together for gymnastics and for invigoration of the mental and moral faculties.<sup>19</sup>

The foregoing sordid picture of lawlessness, brutality, and intimidation in United States' politics in the 1850's, was not of the Know-Nothings' making. Originally, and even to the time of the party's extinction, the movement envisaged the destruction of the assigned cause of political rowdyism—the deleterious political influence of newly naturalized foreign riffraff. But the old adage, that those who play with pitch get smirched, applied to the American Party. Their record, while perhaps a little lighter in color than that of their Democratic opponents, still had a grayish tinge.

<sup>19</sup> Natchez *Daily Courier*, July 6, 1854.



Sam Know Nothing off to the North

FROM THE LITTLE ROCK *True Democrat*, JANUARY 29, 1856



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### RAPID DECLINE

1857

**A**LONG THE Atlantic Seaboard the American Party by 1857 had disappeared in South Carolina and had to all practical purposes ceased to exist in Virginia. Only in North Carolina and Georgia was there enough strength to contest with the dominant Democracy.

Although county meetings continued occasionally to refer to themselves as "Whigs and Americans," most Virginia members endorsed the sentiments expressed by the Lynchburg *Virginian* when it said: "The absence of all excitement in Virginia growing out of Federal politics and the obvious futility of any further immediate effort by the opposition to overthrow the ancient dynasty of locofocoism, makes the occasion propitious for the discussion of topics relating to the policy of the State in regard to which party influence need not operate."<sup>1</sup>

As the year drew on, "Whig" became the usual opposition-party designation. In 1858 "Opposition" replaced this.

The year 1857 was a dull year in North Carolina politics. The editor of the Raleigh *Register* wrote after the late summer elections were over: "We can scarcely say that the smoke of battle has cleared away, for in this state there was not enough battle to create much smoke." During the year at irregular intervals local municipal elections gave a few victories to the expiring party. The Americans lost Wilmington for the first time since their origin. The chief political interest of this year settled over the contests for Congress. The Americans ran candidates for Congress in only four districts, the First, Third, Fifth, and Sixth. These

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Richmond *Whig and Public Advertiser*, February 10, 1857.

were William N. H. Smith, O. P. Meares, John A. Gilmer, and R. C. Puryear, respectively. Gilmer ran against a fellow party member, M. Q. Waddell. Charles Reade, the incumbent and an American, refused to make the race. Smith, until his nomination, had been considered a strong Democrat.<sup>2</sup>

The only local question that aroused much interest was concerning distribution—a dispute over the advisability of distributing the returns from Federal-land sales to the states. Smith spoke at Camden and endorsed it heartily. Illinois, he said, was flourishing because of internal improvements at the expense of the Federal government while the older states were laboring and having difficulties. When Thomas L. Clingman as a Democrat was accused by the Americans of being a Distributionist he vehemently denied it. The Fayetteville *Observer* spoke of the “skulking attempts of the locofocos” to pin defeat of Western railroads upon Americans. The Raleigh *North Carolina Standard*, Asheville *News*, and the Asheville *Spectator* disputed the matter.

Aided by dissension between the Raleigh *Register* and the Fayetteville *Observer*, various members began to toy with the idea of disbanding the party. To an increasing extent the title “American Whig” came into usage. The *Register* under the caption “Should the American Party be abandoned?” continued its opposition to any policy allowing the party to die.

Occasionally the issues of the previous year were rethashed and controversy excited over current national policies. The *Standard* did not wish to see the Lecompton Constitution crammed down the throats of the Kansans. A few Know-Nothings assumed that this meant subordination of Southern constitutional rights.

Continued existence of party animosity was shown by the *Standard's* announcement that “henceforth, for the sake of brevity, we may say the ‘Plug Ugly Party’; but with the name written in full it will appear something after this sort: ‘Know-Nothing-American-Whig-Black Republican-Sam-Federal-Plug-Ugly-Rip Rap-Shoulder-Hitter-Dark-Lantern-Culvert Party.’ ”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Raleigh *Weekly Register*, January 21, 28, August 12, 1857; Thomas Horne Leath, “Know Nothing Party in North Carolina,” unpublished master's thesis at North Carolina University, 1928, 45.

<sup>3</sup> Raleigh *North Carolina Weekly Standard*, July 1, 1857.

In the legislature most of the legislation was of a partisan nature. Little was accomplished as the lawmakers concentrated on discussions of Federal politics. As the result of general apathy the Americans elected only one Congressman, John A. Gilmer, in the Sixth District. The Democratic majority in the First District was only 38 and in the Fourth, 729. In the other districts the Democrats had a walkaway. The Free Suffrage amendment, which had been referred to the people and had not been a partisan issue, carried two to one.<sup>4</sup>

Many Americans in Georgia, unlike the Tarheels, undaunted by their failure to carry the state election in 1855 and the national race in 1856, entered 1857 with enthusiasm. Early in January the Atlanta municipal ticket was elected in its entirety. The Macon *Citizen* advocated a thorough overhauling of the Georgia party to take advantage of the bright prospects of victory, though a writer in the Atlanta *American* said that he and the 600 Know-Nothings in Forsyth County were willing to let the election go by default. The Sumpter *Republican* carried similar discussions pro and con.

The Atlanta *American* urged the Georgians to send delegates to the National Convention at Louisville. After much discussion the Central Executive Committee called a state convention to be held at the capital July 8. Numerous American county conventions were held. Those of Elbert, Wilkes, Columbia, Morgan and Gwinnett counties, after selecting delegates to the state convention, passed nativistic resolutions and predicted eventual victory for the party and its policies in Georgia.

An American convention at Lawrenceville resolved: "That the public lands of the United States are the common property of all the States—both old and new, and that the recently inaugurated policy of the modern Democracy in giving away million after million of acres to new States to the exclusion of the old is unequal and unjust, and tends to foster in the new States a desire to increase their population to improve the price of land thus thrown upon the Market, and which naturally open the door for the introduction of Foreign Pauperism and Foreign Abolitionism."

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, August 19, September 23, 1857; Hamilton, *Party Politics in North Carolina*, 183.

Various candidates were suggested for the governor's place on the ticket. Among these were Washington Poe, Ambrose R. Wright, Eli Baxter, Joel Crawford, John Milledge, R. P. Trippe, W. V. Hardeman, and Benjamin Hill.

When the state convention assembled at Milledgeville, 55 counties sent delegates. The platform which they issued favored the maintenance of the union of the co-equal sovereign states, obedience to the Constitution and all laws passed in pursuance of it, freedom of religion, separation of Church and State, purity of the ballot box, and exclusion of foreign pauper immigration. It declared that the territory of the United States was common property from which slavery could not be excluded. It labeled squatter sovereignty as a Republican scheme. Governor Robert J. Walker was condemned and the Georgia platform praised. It opposed the Federal government's building of the Pacific Railroad as this would put the proceeds from government lands into individual hands rather than those of the states.<sup>5</sup>

The Democrats held a convention to select their candidate for governor. Joe E. Brown was chosen as the standard bearer after twenty ballots were taken. Arrangements were made for the two rival candidates, Brown and Benjamin Hill, to canvass the state jointly. Brown was to open with an hour speech, Hill to follow with one hour and one half, then Brown was to close with an additional half hour. Time was generally left in order that congressional candidates could have the platform for an hour each. In these debates Hill so far surpassed Brown that Brown retired from joint debate. In north Georgia, Brown did not meet with favorable attention, but after being coached by Robert Toombs he proved more effective in south Georgia.<sup>6</sup>

The Americans denounced the Democratic strategy as one of waving the flag and levying charges in order to avoid local issues. They endorsed the older nativistic issues but wished to concentrate on newer and more local concerns, being particularly anxious to make the state railroad system and its management a party question. The Democrats avoided the question when possible but, when cornered, desired to keep the State Road.

<sup>5</sup> *Augusta Daily Chronicle and Sentinel*, July 7, 8, 1857.

<sup>6</sup> *Milledgeville Southern Recorder*, August 4, 5, September 14, 1857; Hill, *Joseph E. Brown and the Confederacy*, 16-17.



The Democrats were in a ticklish spot in regard to Governor Walker's conduct of the Kansas affair. Their state platform condemned Walker's action but refused to criticize Buchanan for appointing and supporting him. Hill attempted to pin Brown on this point, but Brown eluded this argument and avoided speaking from the same platform. The Americans again pointed out the danger of alien suffrage to the South and protested against the administration's policy of allowing foreigners to outvote citizens in Kansas.

The campaign was heated and vigorous, equaling the interest aroused by the previous presidential campaign. Brown won the day with 57,631 votes to 46,889 for Benjamin Hill. These returns represented a loss of nearly 4,000 votes from the previous year for the Democrats. Thirty-two Americans and 86 Democrats won seats in the state senate. The house stood 50 Americans to 105 Democrats. Two American Congressmen, R. P. Trippe in the Third District, and Joshua Hill in the Seventh, were victorious. Joshua Hill's success over Linton Stephens was doubly sweet, as Stephens had formerly been in the party.<sup>7</sup>

Although most Georgia Know-Nothings combined to oppose the Democrats, only minor party victories could be claimed in 1858. In the spring of 1859 the Executive Committee, appointed on July 1, 1857, refused to call a state convention, as they realized the party was already dead. The universal acceptance of their action ended the American Party in Georgia.

There were few observable indications of the beginning of the end of Know-Nothingism in the states of the Upper South in the early months of 1857. Interest was still marked and not until later did the struggle seem entirely hopeless. In Maryland there was little or no political activity until the spring months of 1857 when nominations for state offices were made. Maryland law provided that the state should be divided into three gubernatorial districts and the governors elected from these districts in rotation. In 1857 the Baltimore District was to provide the governor.

The state convention met in Baltimore on July 23 and nominated Thomas H. Hicks for governor, W. H. Purnell for comptroller, D. H. McPhail for lottery commissioner, and James B.

<sup>7</sup> *Augusta Daily Chronicle and Sentinel*, July 22, August 4, 5, September 23, November 12, 1857; *Whig Almanac*, 1858, 56.

Ricaud for Congress from the First District. County conventions nominated the other candidates for Congress and the local offices.<sup>8</sup>

Very little interest was aroused over issues of state-wide significance. The Baltimore Democrats were so disorganized and disheartened that they did not send delegates to their state convention, where so much dissension reigned that candidates were not nominated but were "recommended." Throughout the state only where dissatisfied Americans were willing to unite with the Democrats did the latter offer purely local candidates, with Democrats as individuals offering themselves for state offices. The true interest of the campaign lay in the city of Baltimore. Here Mayor Swann was sincerely attempting to reform the city administration and to clean up the lawlessness which had ruled for years. In his annual message to the city council in January of 1857 he urged reform in the city's penal laws and advocated their codification, the establishment of a comptroller to supervise and check the expenditures of the treasury and to help force the city commissions to keep within appropriations. He favored new health ordinances and a revision of sewage disposal.

After a spirited campaign and riotous election, the Americans carried Baltimore by 17,850 votes to 8,211. A majority was needed as the total Democratic majority in the state outside of Baltimore was 1,179. The surprisingly strong Democratic strength in rural districts sprang from the apathy of Americans and the individual appeal of the Democratic candidates. The Americans thus elected the governor, Thomas H. Hicks, their state ticket, most of the legislators, and four of the six Congressmen.

Know-Nothings in Tennessee felt little reason to be discouraged about their party's meager success in 1856 and entered the congressional campaign of 1857 with optimism. Early in April they held a state convention and nominated Robert Hatton for the governorship to run against Isham G. Harris, the Democratic nominee. A platform of ten planks was issued. The second, third, and tenth resolutions were the only ones tinged with nativism, and they were mild in expression and largely related to foreign voters in the territories. The other resolutions demanded equal

<sup>8</sup> *Baltimore Patriot*, August 5, 1857.

distribution among the states of the proceeds of Federal-land sales, favored the extension of the Pacific Railroad, recommended the cessation of slavery agitation and endorsed the Federal Union.

The issues debated by the candidates were largely concerned with those enunciated in the American platform. Hatton declared that Tennessee was entitled to \$30,000,000 as her share of land sales in order to pay the state's debts and endow a better school system. He saw the descendants of the Hessians who had fought against liberty getting "remuneration in Iowa while Tennesseans got nothing." Hatton also was adverse to Catholics' holding office because he felt they were bound to temporal obedience to the Pope. Harris said that he could see no reason why aliens should not be allowed to vote in the Territory, and he became involved in a fist fight with Hatton when the latter declared this was an infamous doctrine. There was occasion for this display of temper since the two candidates had fifty-three joint debates scheduled between May 25 and August 3.

The Americans attempted to minimize nativistic discussions. They added support of a normal school in an attempt to reach new issues and new voters. Andrew Johnson took an active interest in the campaign. A Democratic victory would assure him a seat in the Senate. He spoke on numerous occasions and charged that in the free states, although all abolitionists were not Know-Nothings, all Know-Nothings were abolitionists.

Harris was victorious by a majority of 11,672 votes out of a total of 131,406. This was an increase of over 4,000 over James Buchanan's majority. In 1857 the Americans got some 7,000 fewer votes than in 1856, while the Democrats lost some 2,000. The results placed 7 Americans and 18 Democrats in the senate, and 33 Americans and 43 Democrats in the house.<sup>9</sup>

The year 1857 marked the end of the party in the state, most of its members reassociating themselves as an opposition party. The Democrats often referred to the Opposition Party as the Know-Nothings, and occasionally local bodies used the name in

<sup>9</sup> Gohmann, *Political Nativism in Tennessee*, 147-49; Caskey, "The Second Administration of Governor Andrew Johnson," *loc. cit.*, II, 51-52; M. B. Hamer, "The Presidential Campaign of 1860 in Tennessee," in *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, No. 3 (January, 1931), Chaps. I-III; *Whig Almanac*, 1858, 57.

conjunction with "Whig" and "Opposition." In 1858 the only elections were judicial and by 1859 all semblance of nativistic organization was gone. Neil S. Brown summed up the death of Americanism in a letter to John Bell in the late summer of 1858. He wrote: "And now Whigs & Americans have become synonymous, & of the tenets which marked the origin of the American party, none remain, save the exclusion of foreign paupers & criminals and the extension of the time necessary to naturalization. The opposition party is made up almost entirely of Whigs—the Democrats who formerly acted with us having gone off."<sup>10</sup>

Although there was a demand for a thorough reorganization of the party in Kentucky, the State Council which met on January 21, 1857, made no extensive changes, tabling a resolution to revive the original ritual. A new Executive Committee of thirteen members with headquarters in Louisville was composed of Curran Pope, W. K. Thomas, H. J. Billings, T. C. Pomeroy, J. P. Chambers, Blanton Duncan, L. A. Whitley, D. Spalding, H. W. Norton, S. A. Foss, Thomas Shanks, J. B. O'Bannon, and Jonas Fulkin. Without further action the Council adjourned until April.

Throughout the spring of 1857 the local councils held numerous and frequent meetings. The Frankfort *Commonwealth* and the Somerset *Gazette* became involved in a quarrel with Democratic papers as to which party incorporated in its ranks the most and richest slaveowners. The assessor's books in Franklin County showed that 1,797 slaves were owned by Americans and 886 were owned by Democrats. In Pulaski County the Americans owned 1,017 to 204 for the Democrats. Members used this information to answer the charge of the Democrats that their party was friendly to abolitionism.<sup>11</sup>

The party had a more telling defense on this point in their own criticism of Buchanan's endorsement and support of Governor Walker. They were incensed by a portion of his Inaugural Address in which he said: "It is the imperative and indispensable duty of the Government of the United States to secure to every resident inhabitant [of the Kansas Territory] the free expression of his opinion." They insisted that the policy and practice which

<sup>10</sup> Neil S. Brown to John Bell, August 10, 1858, Bell Papers.

<sup>11</sup> Frankfort *Commonwealth*, January 27, February 17, 24, 1857. Only 41,000 persons in Kentucky owned property equal in value to one slave.

allowed the Immigrant Aid Society to rush immigrants to Kansas to vote for free-soilism, was 100 per cent against Southern interests. "Buchanan—Breckinridge—and Free Kansas" were often linked together.

The *Commonwealth*, complaining that the order's platform had been ignored in the campaign of 1856, attempted to fan nativistic flames still burning in Kentucky by publication of articles concerning foreign criminals in New York, and in addition a small amount of anti-Catholic literature. In March the journals of the state became concerned over the story of Mary E. B. Miller, who had been placed in the convent at Nazareth near Bardstown in January, 1856, and who claimed that so much religious pressure and severe discipline were brought to bear upon her that she sought to communicate with her brother. When this brought additional pressure she fled some twenty miles on foot. To some nativists, here was proof of the wiles and wickedness of Catholicism, while to Democrats the affair was pure fabrication.<sup>12</sup>

In May the party met, nominated a state ticket, and passed a resolution declaring that all who sympathized with them would be regarded as full members of the American Party. However, during this campaign J. F. Bell (who was to be the American candidate for governor in 1859) was careful to make as few allusions to the Lecompton Constitution and to Americanism as possible. Bell felt like a "stray calf" with no party affiliations, and therefore welcomed American overtures. This willingness of Bell to consider affiliation with the Know-Nothings in Kentucky was an indication of their seemingly increasing strength, though they were somewhat shocked, when the returns came in, to find that they were losing control of the state. The contest of 1857 was to select the Federal Congressman, the members of the legislature, and the state treasurer. The party filled twenty seats out of thirty-eight in the state senate, and thirty-nine seats out of ninety-seven in the house of representatives. There were a few American hold-overs in the senate but they lost control of the legislature. In the race for state treasurer the Democrat, J. H. Garrad, had a majority over T. L. Jones of over 12,000 out of 118,000 votes. Only two Americans, W. L. Underwood in the Third District, and

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, April 14, July 7, 1857; *Washington Weekly American Organ*, April 2, August 2, 1857.

Humphrey Marshall in the Seventh District, were successful in the races for Congress.<sup>13</sup>

Know-Nothings denied that they were guilty of roughness at the polls and charged that the Democrats had imported alien voters and had offered large sums for votes in the Ashland district. In Lexington the party evidenced great confidence and began an active campaign for control of the municipal government.

In Missouri, political activity for the year 1857 did not get under way until the April mayoralty contest in St. Louis. On March 21, the Free State Party nominated John M. Wimer. This made a three-cornered race between Wimer, I. Pratte, Democrat, and William Carr Lane, American. Lane, though he had once been mildly antislavery, did not wish any further slavery agitation. He felt that the white population of St. Louis need not fear economic competition from St. Louis' relatively few slaves. Lane received only 1,831 votes to 3,759 for Pratte, and 5,487 for Wimer.

On August 3, Governor Trusten Polk was chosen United States Senator to replace the Whig, Henry S. Geyer. A special election was held in August to fill the vacancy. James S. Rollins, Independent, but formerly an American, faced Robert S. Stewart, a representative of the Anti-Benton Democrats who, Rollins charged, was a former Know-Nothing. Slavery was not an out-and-out issue. Rollins had left the American Party to gain support from most of the antislavery bloc led by Francis P. Blair, Jr. Frederick Muench and Arnold Krekel, prominent German leaders, and the St. Louis *Anzeiger des Westens* brought German support to the American candidate. Rollins, a slave owner, announced that he was in favor of protecting slavery in Missouri as long as she was a slave state, but that there might come a time when it would be to Missouri's interest to abandon the peculiar institution. Rollins was known as an "Emancipationist," not an "Abolitionist." Stewart was intensely proslavery. He won by only 329 votes. The total count stood 47,975 to 47,646. Missouri historians are of the opinion that Rollins was the true winner, losing because of vote stealing. Rollins carried St. Louis County

<sup>13</sup> Albert Burnley to J. J. Crittenden, May 11, 1857, Crittenden Papers, Duke University; W. H. Perrin and J. H. Battle, *Kentucky: A History of the State* (Louisville, 1886), 329.

by over 1,700 votes. The vote of St. Louis was determined during the American period more by a candidate's attitude toward slavery than by other combinations of appeals. However, the *Daily Missouri Republican* in analyzing the votes demonstrated that Rollins' heaviest support came from the "slave counties." In the judicial election for the Supreme Court, those candidates endorsed by Rollins were successful.<sup>14</sup>

During 1858 Missouri Americans retained their organization with state and subordinate councils but, though claiming some 40,000 members, were more or less ineffectual. When Representative Thomas L. Anderson, an American political leader in northeast Missouri, announced that he felt that he must, despite his Know-Nothing principles, choose between the two major political parties, he was denounced throughout the state. One by one other associates, such as William F. Switzler, changed allegiance. Despite such defections two American Congressmen were elected.

In Arkansas the new party practically disappeared with the defeat of Fillmore. In the Democratic internecine quarrelling, references were occasionally made to "Know-Nothing" editors, or "American" victories, but these were vaporings to discredit other factions. For some obscure reason Arkansas was represented at the National Convention in Louisville in 1857, but this is no indication of party activity in the state, as antagonists to Democracy called themselves "Opposition."<sup>15</sup>

The year 1857 marked the death of Americanism in four of the Gulf states, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. Only in Louisiana did the party continue to thrive at the close of the year.

The spirits of many Texas members had been dampened by their inability to deliver Texas for Fillmore and by defeats in the cities of Austin and San Antonio. They had controlled Austin since their organization and its loss did not lend encouragement for the state election which occurred in December, 1857.

Preparing for the campaign with determination, they established three new journals, the *Marshall Harrison Flag*, Huntsville

<sup>14</sup> Merkel, "The Antislavery Controversy in Missouri, 1819-1865," 249, 257; *Whig Almanac*, 1858, 55, 1859, 56.

<sup>15</sup> Little Rock *True Democrat*, October 20, 1858, January 19, March 23, 1859; Fort Smith *Times*, June 30, July 21, 1858.

*Recorder*, and the *Seguin Journal*, though evidence was given that one of the party's staunchest organs was giving up the fight. In March, 1857, F. M. Gibson, the junior editor of the *Texas State Times* resigned because of differences of opinion in politics with the editor, T. S. Ford. In May, Ford reaffiliated with the Democrats, announcing that he was doing so because of his duty to the South. He still accredited the Americans with high patriotic motives.<sup>16</sup>

Some confusion arose over the calling of the American nominating convention. The *Times*, which had been the customary leader, was of course holding back. Finally the *Harrison Flag*, published at Marshall in the extreme north corner of the state, came forward urging action and got the state convention called to meet at the little village of Fairfield in Freestone County on June 1. Even before this assembly met, Sam Houston was in the field as an avowed aspirant for the gubernatorial office. Houston professed to have been drafted and wrote his friend and confidant of old, Dr. Ashbel Smith: "I hope to regenerate the politics of the State & save the public money & the land, for public purposes, & uses."<sup>17</sup>

The Democrats knew Houston's strength in the state and girded their loins for a struggle. James Reily wrote Thomas J. Rusk: "We know it is a struggle for political existence and if elected Governor in the present crisis, the Northern Party, must take him [Houston] for president."<sup>18</sup> The Democrats were uneasy about Rusk's position, fearing that he would allow personal attachment to Houston to draw him away from the Democratic Party. Rusk's papers show numerous letters anxiously pressing him for a statement against Houston.<sup>19</sup>

The campaign was a warm one. The Democrats counted upon their success in opposing purely "American" issues and utilized their old arguments over again. Against Houston they argued that his opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Bill made him unsafe. The Know-Nothings insisted that the voters should ask whether Har-

<sup>16</sup> Austin *Texas State Times*, May 23, 1857; J. S. Ford, *Memoirs*, The University of Texas, typescript copy, 7 vols., IV, 660.

<sup>17</sup> Sam Houston to Ashbel Smith, July 6, 1857, Smith Papers.

<sup>18</sup> James Reily to Thomas J. Rusk, May 21, 1857, Rusk Papers.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Rock to *id.*, January 25, 1857; eight men from Liberty to *id.*, June 22, 1857; J. H. Brown to *id.*, July 11, 1857, *ibid.*



din S. Runnels, the Democratic candidate, and Sam Houston were "For or against Squatter Sovereignty and Alien Suffrage—the only issue involved in the present canvass." The Texas Americans charged also that Buchanan had sold out Southern interests to the Northern abolitionists.

Houston stumped all sections of the state and made a brilliant campaign, at times resorting to invective in order to gain the favor of his audience. In western and central Texas he had a series of debates with Williamson S. Oldham. His supporters also attempted to make capital of the feeling prevalent among the laboring class against the Mexican laborers who were hired in numbers as day laborers, drovers, shepherds, and cart drivers, and who because of their low living standards were willing to work for very meager wages. Anglo-Saxon Texans resorted to intimidation, force, and bloodshed to drive them out of the occupation of "cart driving." It was alleged that the second "Cart War," which broke out in 1857, was instigated by the Democrats in order that they might pose as protectors of the Mexicans and thus gain their votes.

The election returns gave the Democrats another victory. Runnels received 33,617 votes to 23,812 for Houston. The American candidate for lieutenant governor received 21,057 votes. Houston, however, professed to be satisfied with the contest, writing to Ashbel Smith, "The fuss is over, and the sun yet shines as ever. . . . And were it not for my friends I assure you, I would rejoice at the result." Both houses of the legislature were decidedly Democratic.<sup>20</sup>

In December a flurry was occasioned in Austin by the arrival of the father of a young girl who had died six months previously at the Ursuline Convent where she had been a boarder. Gossip had it that she had not actually died but had been smuggled into another convent and thence to France. The girl had been a Protestant and had been baptized a Catholic against her father's wishes. The story fell to pieces when the body was disinterred and identified.<sup>21</sup>

The year 1857 marked the death of Americanism in Texas. In

<sup>20</sup> Ford, *Memoirs*, IV, 661; Crews, "The Know Nothing Party in Texas," 50-52; *Galveston Daily Civilian*, August 28, 1857; *Austin Texas State Gazette*, August 15, 1857; *Whig Almanac*, 1858, 60.

<sup>21</sup> Parisot, *Reminiscences of a Texas Missionary*, 39-40.

this election the order had shown signs of amalgamating with the "Independent Democrats." Only one of the Democratic nominees in 1858 was contested and that by an "Independent Democrat."

In 1859 Houston made a successful campaign for the governorship, during the course of which he declared in a public letter to the editor of the *Galveston Union*: "I have not known since 1855 of the existence of any organizations in this State of the Know Nothing Order, nor of any intention ever to revive it. For my own part I am not in favor of again agitating that or any other ISM. It was stated years since, that Know Nothingism was dead—I have so regarded it."<sup>22</sup>

The narrow margin of victory in 1856 made the Democrats of Louisiana fear that their opponents, by gaining a larger majority in New Orleans, would control the state. Therefore, measures were taken to prevent such an occurrence. Governor W. C. Wickliffe's message to the legislature in January, 1857, emphasized the point that in New Orleans only 8,333 had voted whereas 11,817 had registered. "These facts," he said, "demonstrate that some extraordinary cause was at work to prevent a large proportion of lawful voters from enjoying the sacred franchise." He asked for an election statute which would enforce the principles of the registration law.<sup>23</sup>

In March, 1857, the legislature complied with his request by passing the "Election Bill," which applied only to Orleans Parish. It provided for the Central Board of Elections to be composed of the mayor of New Orleans, the attorney general, the registrar of voters, and two citizens of the city appointed by the governor. This board appointed commissioners to conduct the elections and to preside at the polls. A superintendent of elections was also created with power to appoint as many deputies as desired, who could arrest anyone without warrant on mere suspicion that a breach of peace was contemplated. These deputies could not be arrested by any local or state force during the election, as all civil police power was suspended, and citizens were required, under heavy penalty, to serve as deputies when called upon. The city of

<sup>22</sup> Sam Houston Papers, clipping from the *Texas Republican*, July 23, 1859.

<sup>23</sup> Baton Rouge *Weekly Gazette and Comet*, January 25, 1857; New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, January 21, 1857.

New Orleans was to be held responsible for all expense incurred by the board.

To the Americans such a "revolutionary bill" was "wild, misguided, tyrannical legislation." The *Delta* protested: "It is . . . giving the Attorney General, as reward for his prosecutions, twenty per cent of the money extracted from his victims. Allow this and we revive the days of Titus Oates and other knaves, and no man is secure. Give blood money to a public officer and he invariably sinks into a bloodsucker." The ten American senators and the twenty-two American representatives in the legislature issued an address directed against it.

The judicial elections of April resulted in the election of six American district judges and several assistant justices. The vote was light and the candidates were not purely party nominees, yet the Know-Nothings rejoiced that it would result in cessation of wholesale naturalization.

In the New Orleans municipal election the following month, balloting was very light and orderly. Only 2,000 votes were cast. The Democrats attempted to make nominations but the Slidellians and anti-Slidellians could not get together and so left the field to the Americans. Mayor Waterman refused to attend the meetings of the election board, as he denied that it was constitutional. The board was still so disorganized that it did not attempt to participate in this election.

Louisiana gave little attention to the National Council of 1857 since interest was centered in the state convention which met at Baton Rouge, June 9, 1857, to nominate candidates for auditor, treasurer, superintendent of public education, and then to separate into district conventions to make nominations for Congress. The convention authorized the appointment of a new state executive committee—one member from each parish except Orleans, which was to have fourteen.<sup>24</sup> Instructed to state the policies and beliefs of the organization, the new committee denounced Democratic misrule, neglect of Louisiana's public schools; demanded protection of a free ballot as a sacred American institution; reaffirmed freedom of religion; and excoriated Democratic failure to "protect" Southern rights in Kansas.

<sup>24</sup> Baton Rouge *Weekly Gazette and Comet*, March 22, June 9, 1857; New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, May 28–June 10, 1857.

State campaigning was enlivened by the struggle in New Orleans over the enforcement of the Election Bill. On July 23 the mayor obtained an injunction prohibiting the election board from functioning. The *Courier* claimed that the Americans had waited until a recess of the Supreme Court so they could seek this action before a district court. Mayor Waterman had refused to take a seat on the board more than two months before, and the superintendent of elections had had plenty of time to have brought the case to court. On October 13 Judge John Blackstone Cotton enjoined the mayor from naming polling places, which forced him to withdraw his injunction.

New Orleans Democrats centered their attack upon alleged mismanagement of the city government and the countenancing of crime and riotings. In defense the new executive committee issued an address giving a detailed account of the number of arrests, the causes, and the nationality of those arrested during American control. They called attention to the much smaller numbers arrested under Democratic administration, and pointed with pride to the fact that in the cases of Auld *vs.* Walton and Bell *vs.* Hufty the only votes proved to have been fraudulently cast were those for Democratic candidates.

The Democrats found trouble in their own ranks as dissension, slight traces of which had appeared before, now became marked. The Know-Nothings took great delight in referring to the "wheel within a wheel"—an epithet which the Clinton *Democrat* applied to the few men who formed an inner controlling ring within its own party.

The election was a decisive defeat for the Americans. They lost the state by 4,649 votes, although George Eustis was returned to Congress. They lost the Second District by less than 100 votes and, in spite of a divided Democratic vote, also lost the Third. They were swamped in the Fourth District by a Democratic majority of 3,800. Of sixteen state senators elected, only two were Americans. The senate was divided 23 to 9, and the house 49 to 38. Thus the Democrats had a majority of 21 votes on a joint ballot. The Know-Nothings won scattered parish and city offices. Some districts such as Plaquemines, St. Landry, Carroll, and Rapides parishes went Democratic on the state ticket but elected

American local officials. The New Orleans municipal election was a clear victory for the party.<sup>25</sup>

The Democrats in New Orleans again claimed violence and fraud but this was more or less through force of habit as the election was much quieter than usual. The Americans refused to cooperate with superintendent of elections John Blackstone Cotton.

In the spring of 1857 Mississippi American papers began to advocate the calling of a state convention on July 4 to nominate candidates and frame a platform built on state issues. The *Grenada Republican* asked what profit there was for Mississippians to allow national issues to paralyze state issues and push their discussion into the background. The *Hinds County Gazette* concentrated its attacks upon the governor's exercise of his pardoning power.

But it was difficult for national issues not to assume prominence. The Madison County American Convention at Canton on May 18 passed resolutions, none of which were local in nature, but which stressed the need of changing the naturalization laws, insisted that slavery agitation was imperiling the Union, and opposed Federal intervention in territories. The Americans were aroused over the practice of aliens' voting in territorial elections.

Fourteen counties were represented at the Jackson State Convention on July 13, which resolved to organize fully for the state elections and to select state candidates immediately and to leave congressional nominations for district conventions. Mississippi had sent a full delegation, consisting of William L. Sharkey, J. H. R. Taylor, W. A. Lake, J. B. Cobb, V. W. Moffitt, C. C. Shackleford, C. H. Hillyer, J. C. Carpenter, L. K. Barber, and J. A. Ventress, to the National Convention at Louisville. The State Convention ratified its action and proceeded to reorganize the Mississippi party by appointing an executive committee of five members and apportioning representation in the state conventions in proportion as each county was represented in the legislature. They announced their principles as constitutionalism, Unionism, cessation of slavery agitation, slavery in all territories,

<sup>25</sup> New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, October 14 ff., 2, 1857; Baton Rouge *Weekly Gazette and Comet*, November 19, 1857; *Whig Almanac*, 1858, 60.

and a purified ballot with unnaturalized citizens barred. Naturally a denunciation of Governor Walker in Kansas was included.

The party nominated James L. Alcorn of Coahoma County for governor. As a lawyer he had been a prominent Whig and had served in the legislature. As a cotton planter and as one of the founders of the state levee system, he was popular with the Delta planters. Alcorn refused to make the race for governor and announced for Congress. His strength and popularity seemed to insure an easy victory until the Democrats matched L. Q. C. Lamar against him. In Alcorn's place the Americans ran E. M. Yerger, a former newspaperman, for governor.<sup>26</sup>

Discouraged by Democratic cries of "not a chance" and by inability to develop major local issues, the Americans were swept down in defeat. Yerger lost to William McWillie 14,095 to 27,377 votes, carrying only two counties, Warren and Hinds. In the northern counties Democratic majorities were large. In every congressional district the Americans were defeated. The legislature was overwhelmingly Democratic. The election was the last effort of the Know-Nothings in the state. Hereafter it was merged into the "Opposition Party."

After their failure in 1856 the Alabama party adopted the name of "Whig and American Party" with the emphasis on the "Whig." Though referred to by the Democrats as the "American" and "Plug Ugly" Party, American party organization and American principles were almost a thing of the past. Democracy was valiantly opposed by fewer and fewer die-hards. The *Tuskegee Republican*, an "anti-Jewish paper," the *Montgomery Mail*, and the *Eutaw Alabama Whig* were among these.

When the Democrats nominated A. B. Moore for governor there was no opposition. Defeatism did not prevent opposition candidates from contesting in state senatorial and representative posts. Only in one congressional district was there much activity. Here T. J. Judge opposed James F. Dowdell. In a speech on July 7 at Tuskegee, Judge defended his advocacy of state internal im-

<sup>26</sup> Raymond (Mississippi) *Hinds County Gazette*, April 27, May 27, July 22, September 2, 1857; Rowland, *Encyclopedia of Mississippi History*, II, 206; *Whig Almanac*, 1858, 55; W. A. Cate, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar* (Chapel Hill, 1935), 50-57.

provements and attacked Buchanan on the Pacific Railroad proposal. Judge answered the argument that he represented no national party by calling the roll of odious Northern Democrats, and he protested against excessive fees charged by the State Land Office. He had not one word for American principles. The *Montgomery Mail* interjected a nativistic note by lashing out at Dowdell for voting to reduce the residence requirements in the District of Columbia and for refusing to aid in restricted immigration.

W. L. Yancey and Henry W. Hilliard stumped the district for Judge; Howell Cobb and Robert Toombs were imported to lend their support and to help mollify disgruntled Democrats. Toombs used the old stock arguments against nativism. He evaded criticism of Walker's conduct in Kansas by saying that he would rather endorse Walker than the American Party.

When the ballots were counted it was found that the Democrats had elected 28 of 33 members of the senate, and 85 of the 100 members of the house. The Democrats made a clean sweep of all the congressional districts. Some were close, as Dowdell won over Judge by only 100 votes, but the defeat was clear-cut and decisive. No pretense of Americanism was made thereafter and the cognomen of "Opposition" was used in 1858 and 1859 except in one or two counties.<sup>27</sup>

The Know-Nothings in Florida professed not to be discouraged by Fillmore's defeat and predicted that by 1860 there would be two sectional parties, the Abolitionists versus the Democrats, and then one great national party. They were unsuccessful in preventing the election of Stephen R. Mallory to the Federal Senate on December 23, 1856. Still picturing the national American Party as a great, vigorous child ready to spring to manhood, they attempted to make capital of the Democratic administration in Kansas and were able to announce a few local victories.

R. K. Call wrote Andrew J. Donelson on April 23, 1858, that the Florida American Party was still active and discussed plans

<sup>27</sup> Eutaw *Alabama Whig*, June 17, 1857; Cahaba (Alabama) *Dallas Gazette*, February 13, May 1, 29, 1857; *Montgomery Daily Mail*, June 11, July 31, 1857; Gainesville (Alabama) *Independent*, October 23, 1858, April 23, 1859; Dorman, *Party Politics in Alabama From 1850 Through 1860*, 141-51.

for the next national election,<sup>28</sup> but when the Democrats held their state convention in 1858 the order had passed so far from the political picture that the Democrats did not bother to waste a plank of their platform on their old antagonists.

<sup>28</sup> R. K. Call to A. J. Donelson, April 23, 1858, Donelson Papers.



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### DYING EFFORTS OF THE AMERICAN PARTY IN THE SOUTH

THE STORY of the American Party after 1856 and 1857 must be sought in its actions in local and state politics. In four states of the South it maintained a vigorous and effective existence in spite of its failure as a national party. Even in those states where it merged into the "Whig and American Party," the "Whig Party," the "Opposition Party," and the Constitutional Union Party, it was able to form a nucleus for the rallying of conservative, union-loving men.

The five states in which it maintained any organization after 1857, more or less in the inverse order of their continued allegiance, were Missouri, North Carolina, Kentucky, Maryland, and Louisiana.

Outside of St. Louis during 1859 over most of Missouri the combination of Free Democrats led by Francis P. Blair, Jr., Benton Democrats, Emancipationists, Americans, and Whigs formed a loosely knit bloc opposed to the National or Pro-slavery Southern Democracy. In St. Louis Americans were able to align the German voters, while the Irish adhered to the National Democracy. By 1860, however, the term Opposition replaced the appellation American and the party passed into history with many of its former leaders and members still continuing their support of "Unionism" during the Civil War.

In North Carolina, the editor of the *Raleigh Register* favored abandonment of its organization and when rebuked by the *Greensboro Patriot* replied: "We would suggest to our Greensboro friend that he lives in such a strong Whig and American

community that he may [have] lost sight of the difficulties which beset the party in other quarters of the State. Everything in his vicinity is *colour de rose*, but he must remember it is not so elsewhere." <sup>1</sup> It was evident that victory in the state could only come through Democratic division. In the state legislature the Democrats were allowed to take all the initiative and to monopolize debate in order to further incipient division over distribution and to foster personal bickerings, and Know-Nothing papers continued to publish occasional articles that were purely nativistic in nature in order to hold the allegiance of the strong nativists.

A desire to support an independent Democrat without calling a convention aroused sharp discussion among American editors. The *Wilmington Herald*, *Weldon Patriot*, *Newbern Express*, *Kingston Advocate*, *Salem Press*, and *Louisburg Eagle* aligned with the *Raleigh Register*. The *Greensboro Patriot* led the *Asheville Spectator*, *Asheville News*, *Salisbury Watchman*, and the *Elizabeth City Sentinel* in opposition.

H. W. Miller was chairman of the American executive committee that had been appointed in 1856, but since he had become a Democrat in April, 1857, he refused to call a state convention, alleging that his authority had expired in 1856. As a result no formal party action was taken.

As had been hoped, serious division sprang up among the Democrats. W. W. Holden, after many years of service as the leading Democratic editor of the state, was asking his party for the nomination for governor. In the preconvention campaign, animosities rose to a fever pitch within the Democratic Party. The questions of internal improvements (railroads) and distribution also created animosities.

The Democrats nominated John W. Ellis for governor. Walter F. Leake also announced as an independent candidate favoring distribution. He withdrew when Duncan McRae announced on a similar platform. McRae had for some months been undecided as to the advisability of running, and had waited until he felt that enough recalcitrant Distribution Democrats might join with the Americans and Whigs to ensure victory. As early as December the *Register* had advocated McRae.

<sup>1</sup> In *Raleigh North Carolina Weekly Standard*, December 2, 1857.

Nativists confined themselves largely to nominations for local offices and the state legislature. Occasionally they spoke of themselves as the American, Whig, and Distribution Party. Ellis and McRae came to blows at Beaufort, but the people of the state were more interested in local questions than in those of state or of national aspects.

The Democrats again won an easy victory. Ellis polled 55,212 to McRae's 38,965 votes. In the Senate the Americans gained six and lost six seats to break even, and added seven and lost four in the House for a net gain of three seats. McRae lost because "all the old line Whigs" of the eastern counties did not support him as they were not interested in Distribution. The one bright spot was the victory of Zebulon B. Vance in a special congressional election created by the elevation of Clingman to the Federal Senate, although Vance later claimed to be Democratic.<sup>2</sup>

In 1859 the American Party disappeared entirely in North Carolina. In February a rumor went the rounds that a legislative caucus had met and resolved to abandon the name American in favor of adding Whig or Opposition. The Opposition state convention in February, 1860, contained one nativistic plank.

The Know-Nothings in Kentucky early in January of 1858 attempted to send Garrett Davis to the Senate but failed to defeat L. W. Powell, who was endorsed by the Democrats. The Americans had control of the senate and could have blocked a joint session necessary to elect a new Senator. Though the Democrats had done this some years previously, the Americans prided themselves on their restraint in not so doing.<sup>3</sup>

On January 27, 1858, the American State Convention assembled in the hall of the house of representatives at Louisville. A new executive committee was chosen and given wide powers of supervision over the general political interests of the party. Some

<sup>2</sup> Boyd, "North Carolina on the Eve of Secession," *loc. cit.*, 169-70; Raleigh *Weekly Register*, December 9, 1857, February 3, June 2, August 11, 1858; L. O. B. Branch, *Letter to His Constituents* (n.p., 1858), *passim*; *Distribution Considered; Together with Sketches of John W. Ellis & D. K. McRae, The State Democratic Platform, etc., etc.* (Raleigh, 1858), *passim*; Henry McGilbert Wagstaff, "State Rights and Political Parties in North Carolina 1776-1861," in *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, series XXIV, Nos. 7-8 (July-August, 1906), 101.

<sup>3</sup> Frankfort *Commonwealth*, January 12, November 16, 1858.

three hundred delegates were present and cast votes for the nomination of the candidate for clerk of the court of appeals, each delegate casting 1 vote for each 100 votes which their county had polled for Fillmore. George R. McKee received this nomination. Ten resolutions insisted on the maintenance of the Federal Union, respect for the rights of states, separation of Church and State, freedom of conscience, promotion of American interests, cessation of sectional agitation, amendment of the naturalization laws to exclude paupers and criminals, equal distribution of the proceeds from the sale of Federal lands, and loyal acceptance and support of, and acquiescence to, decisions of the Supreme Court. The eighth plank read: "The right of suffrage in the States, and Territories should be restricted to CITIZENS of the United States, and the proposition of the Democrats, to enable aliens to participate in the formation of State Constitutions, is a gross perversion of principle, and the best evidence that time and events have added to the reasons that first induced the organization of the American Party." <sup>4</sup>

From time to time adherents assembled in county conventions, nominated candidates, passed resolutions, and listened to political harangues. One such convention praised Crittenden, Marshall, and Underwood for rejecting the Lecompton Constitution, because the best defense for Southern rights would be a "stand for unsullied principles."

When the Democrats insisted that Kentucky Know-Nothings should join with them and bring Kansas in as a slave state, the *Commonwealth* in a long editorial pointed out that it was evident that the Lecompton Constitution was engineered by a minority and would not be acceptable, and that if the Americans united on this issue with Southern Democrats, they would lose their opportunity to criticize Northern antislavery Democrats.

There was no out-and-out single issue being fought. The campaign was one of personalities. The *Louisville Journal* told the *Louisville Courier* that an American candidate would not "have a corporal's guard of support south of the Mason and Dixon's line outside his Plug Ugly, Abolitionist, Black Republican, Free soil, free nigger, and runaway nigger clique."

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, May 4, June 29, 1858.

The Americans exhibited previous Democratic mismanagement of the state penitentiary and indulged in personalities. They concentrated on the need and necessity of the Union and accused their opponents of threatening to destroy it.<sup>5</sup>

On election day, early in August, events passed off peaceably and quietly. The Americans charged the Democrats with a practice similar to the "cooping" of Baltimore. The coop consisted of a "Bull Pen" at Bald Knob where some ten to twenty men were impounded in an old stable for a week or ten days before election. The drunken captives were then marched to polls and voted several times. As only local offices were involved, both parties were merely marking time until the following year when a state ticket and congressmen were to be selected.<sup>6</sup>

In the elections of 1859 the Americans, as such, lost their identity. Former advocates of the party called themselves the Opposition Party. In the state convention of this new party at Louisville, February 22, the prominent delegates included most of the former leading Americans. Nativism was conspicuously not one of the planks of their platform. Although the editor of the *Commonwealth* protested that Democratic assertions of the demise of the party were erroneous, and that the order was merely holding its principles in abeyance, the party was extinct and its issues gone.<sup>7</sup>

In Maryland, Democratic Governor Ligon retained office until January 13, 1858. In the new legislature which convened one week before his term expired only two of the American members had previously served. When Ligon presented a message condemning nativism they refused to hear him or order the message printed on the grounds that he had previously released it to the press. Instead they castigated Ligon in a series of resolutions condemning his action in the Baltimore election. Editorially he was denounced for his pardons of notorious criminals. A jury had recently found one such guilty but he was pardoned before the judge could pass sentence.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, February 2, March 30, April 6-20, May 18, June 22, 29, 1858; Robertson, "Sectionalism in Kentucky from 1855 to 1865," *loc. cit.*, 54.

<sup>6</sup> Frankfort *Commonwealth*, August 10, 17, 1858.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, February 22, March 1, 1859.

<sup>8</sup> Schmeckebier, "History of the Know Nothing Party in Maryland," *loc. cit.*, 90-95; Baltimore *Patriot*, January 14, 1858.

Governor Hicks in his inaugural address said that it was wrong for an industrious native population to have to support foreign paupers, that foreigners provided a ruinous competition for native labor, and that foreign political influence was dangerous. Hicks warned that Maryland stood for religious toleration and for the separation of Church and State, and that it was the duty of citizens to uphold this separation against current attempts to destroy public schools in the state and to distribute public-school funds among sectarian churches. Maryland, he pledged, would not listen to suggestions of disunion nor would she countenance anything destructive of state rights. He advocated new penal codes and warned that an increase in foreign and free-Negro population would lead to an increase of crime in the state.

A few nativistic bills were introduced into the legislature. The Reverend A. B. Cross<sup>9</sup> submitted a petition praying for the suppression of convents and nunneries, without results. A bill to prevent state courts from granting naturalization papers got as far as the third reading.

With the exception of a new educational bill which maintained the religious status quo and a few other minor matters, the American legislators concerned themselves mostly with the problem of calling a new constitutional convention in order to redistrict the state to their own advantage.

There were only a few offices, mainly municipal, to be filled in 1858. In Baltimore the Opposition attempted to show that the city was the worst-governed city in the United States and the most dangerous in which to live. Thomas Swann ran for re-election in Baltimore against an Opposition candidate, A. P. Shutt. The Democrats refused to offer. Shutt withdrew from the race at noon October 3 (the day of the election) on the grounds that intimidation was so prevalent that it endangered his friends to vote for him. The count stood 2,400 to 4,858 votes in favor of Swann.<sup>10</sup>

Feeling continued high against foreigners. On September 27, 1858, a Baltimore German newspaper reported that crowds of toughs were molesting its operations by stoning the windows and buildings of the office.

<sup>9</sup> Cross, *Priests' Prisons for Women*, *passim*, had placed Cross as one of the early and overly enthusiastic advocates of the anti-Catholic features of Americanism.

<sup>10</sup> Scharf, *The Chronicles of Baltimore*, 555-56.

Though quarreling amongst themselves, the Americans presented a formidable front as they nominated their candidates. Although a "reform movement" was sponsored by the Democrats, little could be done in Baltimore itself. Hope was centered on the state elections a few weeks later.

At the polls both parties resorted to force and fraud but the Democrats could not cope with American numbers. Several citizens lost their lives; numbers were bruised and injured.<sup>11</sup>

The election of 1859 was to fill the same state offices as in 1857: members of congress, state attorney, comptroller, and members of the legislature. Baltimore again went nativistic but the counties were almost solidly Democratic, which gave the state to the Democrats. The Know-Nothings found themselves with only ten of the twenty-two senators, and only twenty-eight members of the house, to forty-six for the Democrats. There was a net loss of twenty-six members of both houses.

The Democrats elected Congressmen from the First, Fifth, and Sixth Districts and their state ticket. In the house a controversy arose over the comptroller's office, which was not finally decided until 1861.<sup>12</sup>

In the spring of 1859 the Maryland Americans made a call for a national convention to be composed generally of "the opposition." In 1858 they had seen "independent" or "opposition" only as an excuse for Democrats to try to sneak back into power in Maryland, but as 1860 drew nearer their attitude changed. Henry Winter Davis voted for William Pennington as speaker in 1859 and was raked over the coals by both political factions alike. In a private letter to Governor Hicks he gave as his reason for voting for a Republican speaker, the hope that this might bring Republican support for an American presidential candidate in 1860. Lincoln was against this idea as he felt it would yield only one state's vote, that of Maryland.<sup>13</sup>

In order to cripple the Know-Nothings, the state government passed a law taking the control of the Baltimore police from the

<sup>11</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, November 5, 1859.

<sup>12</sup> *Whig Almanac*, 1860, 50; Schmeckebier, "History of the Know Nothing Party in Maryland," *loc. cit.*, 103-104.

<sup>13</sup> George L. P. Radcliffe, "Governor Thomas H. Hicks of Maryland and the Civil War," in *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, XIX (1901), 521-22.

hands of its mayor. The Baltimore municipal campaign was the last one made by Americans in the state. Proving ineffectual in their attempts to stem the reform movement, they lost the mayor's office and control of both branches of the city council.<sup>14</sup> To a large extent they supported the Constitutional Union Party.

In 1858 the only marked political movement affecting Louisiana Americans was in New Orleans. On May 20 an "Independent Ticket" was announced in opposition to them which declared that under their control New Orleans' commerce was being ruined, her real estate was depreciating in value, and the city debt was increasing with a corresponding rise in taxes. The Independents charged that the police were inefficient and corrupt and gave no protection, and they alleged that lax criminal administration allowed assassination and murder to destroy the reputation of the city. They claimed to be the reform element of the Democrats, Whigs, and Americans.

The Americans regarded this movement as one launched by the "Democratic wire pullers," and those nominated on the reform ticket refused to run. Nevertheless a close eye was kept on conditions, the Executive Committee meeting every night of the week before the municipal election.

The Americans won a decisive victory at the polls. The Independents elected only three aldermen and one recorder. Gerard Smith, the new mayor, ran behind his ticket, an indication that the voting was not strictly on a party basis. The Independent movement was undoubtedly an honest attempt to reform the government of New Orleans. Such men as C. M. Conrad, who had been Secretary of War under Fillmore, signed the call for its formation. Its chances of success would probably have been much greater had it not resorted to violence. The regular Americans held no grudge against those who had "strayed" into the Independent fold, but welcomed them back when the movement failed.<sup>15</sup>

Early in 1859 the impending break in Democratic ranks was again shown in the contest in the house over the election of a United States Senator to succeed Judah P. Benjamin. When a

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 523; *Baltimore Sun*, October 11, 18, September 29, 1860.

<sup>15</sup> *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, May 26, June 2, 1858, November 7, 1859.



Democratic caucus on a close vote declared Benjamin the party candidate, the anti-Slidellian group broke away and selected a pronounced secessionist. The Know-Nothings supported their own candidate, and for forty-one ballots no decision could be reached. With the support of five Americans, Benjamin was elected on the next ballot. The anti-Slidellians had counted strongly upon Know-Nothing support, and were bitter when this was refused. The *Sugar Planter* explained: "The American Party, it is true, is now disorganized but the mass of that party hold that this Union must and shall be preserved, and it is a fatal mistake to suppose that they will ever unite with those whose political antecedents tend to disunion. Bitter as is our opposition to the Slidell and Buchanan influence in this state, and in the nation, it is nothing in comparison to our opposition to sectionalism." <sup>16</sup>

In March, 1859, certain members of the legislature attempted to revive the old Whig Party. That party which had "slumbered but not died" was called upon to "Arise, arise, shake off the dew-drops that glitter on your garments, and once more move to battle and to victory." Some American papers, especially the *Sugar Planter*, at first gave encouragement, while others opposed the loss of separate identity; but the plan did not materialize. Nativism was not entirely defunct although its strength had dwindled. Only three country papers remained to the party. In Avoyelles, East Feliciana, and other parishes the "kettle was kept boiling" in hope that the two Democratic factions would "kick the pot over" to the advantage of the Americans.

In May, George Eustis, who had served four years in Congress, changed allegiance because: "The fusion of the shattered legions of the Americans, in most of the free States, with the Republican Party—their repeated and overwhelming defeats in the Southern States—the sectional color assumed by the politics of the country, leave no room to doubt the fact that, as a national party, the American Party no longer exists." <sup>17</sup> Other prominent Know-Nothing leaders, such as Peter Alexander, Louis Texada, Robert Fuller, George Wooley, and Robert Pond, began to see the handwriting on the wall and changed to the Democratic Party.

<sup>16</sup> There were still thirty-one Americans and Independents in the lower house of the legislature.

<sup>17</sup> New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, May 16, 1859.

The annual New Orleans municipal election found an independent ticket again in the field. The *Courier* did not support the movement because it desired the Democrats to put forth a ticket of their own. The *Delta* led the attack by demanding a change to a nonpartisan set of officials who would reduce high taxation, keep the streets clean of mud and filth that clogged them, provide plenty of water, and render more impartial justice. The *Crescent* as usual defended the American Party and its record in office and refuted every point advanced by the Independents.

The previous advances to the Germans had been received in such a friendly way that an active campaign was conducted by the American Party among them. The election was another American victory. Only a light vote was cast amidst some violence.<sup>18</sup>

On August 24, 1859, a notice was inserted in the *Crescent* calling for a meeting of all who opposed the state ticket recently nominated by the Democrats. Opposition groups had sprung up over the state and were eager to co-operate in a state movement. Avoyelles, Caddo, and Rapides parishes had especially strong organizations. A state convention was called to meet in Baton Rouge on September 2, 1859, but such short notice was given that few northern or distant parishes could send delegates. The old Know-Nothings had several objections to the new opposition party, its platform, and nominees. The influence of disgruntled Democrats in organizing the party, especially the hand of Pierre Soulé, was distasteful.<sup>19</sup>

In New Orleans the Americans took pains to keep their own separate and distinct organization, and they nominated their own parish and congressional tickets. The Slidellian Democrats unsuccessfully attempted to split the American vote by starting "Independent American Clubs." The *Crescent* several times jeered at the state Opposition Party, yet advised that it be supported. Whenever big rallies and mass meetings were held, the Know-Nothing clubs marched to them in a body and left in a body to ensure their separateness of organization being marked. At several

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, May 21, June 3 ff., May 30 ff., 1859.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, August 24, 1859; *Alexandria Louisiana Democrat*, August 31, 1859. A hasty investigation would tend to lead to the erroneous conviction that the Democrats played the leading part in the formation of the party.

of these meetings Pierre Soulé was scheduled to make addresses, but for some reason "illness" always opportunely prevented.

The campaign was one of interest to all the state. Division had grown in the Democracy until there was a multiplicity of names used to describe various factions. It was declared that there were Hard-Shell Democrats, Soft-Shell Democrats, Old-Liner Democrats, Short-and-Long-Tailed Democrats, Know-Nothing Democrats, Douglas and anti-Douglas Democrats, Old Jackson Democrats, Union and State-Rights Democrats, Old Whig Democrats, Slidellians in Easy Circumstances, Slidellians Who Had Not Been Paid, Opposition Democrats, Independent Ex-Know-Nothing Democrats, Calhoun Democrats, Independents, and Americans.

The election returns showed that the Democrats had carried their state ticket by about 9,000 votes. An American was elected to Congress from the First District, the only district in which they had a ticket. The Oppositionists lost the Second, Third, and Fourth Districts by 1,466, 5,562, and 5,603 votes respectively. The American ticket in the First District was successful almost to the man; the Democrats obtained only three of the representatives. Several parishes went Democratic for the state ticket, but chose Opposition or "Independent" local officials. In some instances this was the result of deliberate bargains or trades.<sup>20</sup>

By 1860 the American Party in Louisiana had nearly passed into history. In 1859 its identity had been merged into the Opposition Party and, except for some half-dozen or more parishes, of which Orleans was the chief, it no longer retained its name.<sup>21</sup>

Even in its last strongholds in Louisiana the American Party was beginning to break up. In the New Orleans city election, June 7, 1860, there were three tickets in the field, American, Citizen, and Independent. The *Crescent*, which had long been so prominent in the party's history, refused to support the nominees because, "They were not fairly, nor justly, nor legally nominated by any rule or law or understanding that has prevailed with the American Party since its formation."<sup>22</sup>

The American candidate for mayor was elected by a majority

<sup>20</sup> Alexandria Louisiana Democrat, August 24, November 5, 1859; New Orleans Daily Crescent, October 24 ff., 1859; Whig Almanac, 1860, p. 57.

<sup>21</sup> New Orleans Daily Crescent, May 12, 1860. <sup>22</sup> Ibid., April 17, 19, 1860.

of 1,734 out of 7,593. The party also returned two recorders, one alderman, and six assistant aldermen. The Citizens chose one recorder, three aldermen, three assistant aldermen, and the street commissioner. Two Independent candidates for recorder and alderman were successful. It was hard to judge party strength by these figures, as several candidates received votes from the other parties.<sup>23</sup>

So ended the last election in Louisiana and in the South in which the American Party participated. Southerners had been governed by a number of motives in associating themselves with the American movement. Primarily, they believed that uncontrolled foreign immigration threatened native institutions. Many of them, recognizing a difference between the practice and tenets of "American Catholicism" and "European Catholicism," feared that the papacy designed to gain temporal powers in the United States through its control of "European Catholic" immigrants. Other Southerners, fewer in numbers, hated Catholicism of any kind. The Southern wing of the order, with many Catholic members, felt in all honesty that opposition to "papal claims of temporal allegiance" did not in the slightest degree infringe upon Anglo-Saxon traditions of religious freedom.

Many clear-thinking men endorsed the American Party because they saw so sharply the dangers to the South of mass immigration to the North. The party was also regarded by Southern conservatives as a possible avenue of escape from the increasingly controversial question of slavery. By avoiding sectional friction and uniting the peoples of the country on new issues, the new party blindly hoped to decrease sectional feeling. Unionists were a major group in the composition of Know-Nothingism in every Southern state. Union sentiment was ingrained in every fiber of its principles and actions in the South. The Third Degree, the Unionist expressions of state and local groups both in speech and in platform, and the actions of their representatives in Congress confirm American allegiance to Unionism. An examination of the close association of the order's former leaders with the Constitution and Union Party, and an analysis of voting strength of the

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, May 30, 1860. The office of street commissioner was bitterly contested, as clean streets was the chief issue of the citizens' ticket.

two groups, lends additional evidence of the part Unionism played in Southern Americanism.

Some men joined because they had previously been Whigs, traditionally opposed to Democracy, and because they found no other opposition party in the South. There were also those who used the novel movement as a temporary haven while they tested the political winds. A few men became members in order to obtain office. Others were attracted by the secrecy, the mystery, and the excitement offered. Economic rivalry between native workingmen and foreign-born labor was a negligible factor in attracting Southerners.

The American Party was condemned because of its secrecy, which it never thoroughly practiced, or even intended to practice, except for an initial period of organization. Its advocates were labelled as rioters and inciters of mob action. That American members did participate in serious riotings in such cities as Baltimore, Louisville, and New Orleans is undeniably true, but that they were the cause or the provocation of these riots is not so evident. The new movement was an organized protest against foreignism, which was one of the great contributing factors to mob violence and political corruption. Many features of Know-Nothingism were radical and objectionable, but, as William E. Dodd once observed, "No great aggressive party is likely to grow out of conservative beginnings."<sup>24</sup>

Most of the historians who have surveyed the era in which the Americans appeared, and even the more special students of the period, have relegated the American Party to an obscure place in national history. Possessed with the hindsight of knowledge of the coming of the Civil War, they have tended to interpret every event of the decade before the war in the light of the "inevitable conflict." As a rule, nativists have been briefly condemned and cast aside on the ground that they were an un-American, harmful evil, fostering a secret political society cultivating racial and religious hatreds, unimportant because their life span was short.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> William E. Dodd, *The Cotton Kingdom* (New Haven, 1931), 122 (Vol. XXVII of *The Chronicles of America*).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. S. E. Forman, *Our Republic* (New York, 1935), 398-99; John Spencer Bassett, *A Short History of the United States* (New York, 1934), 494; Clement Eaton, *Freedom of Thought in the Old South* (Durham, 1940), 303-305; George

Rarely has it been pointed out that American leaders truly aspired to make the American order into a national party at a time when Republican and certain Southern Democratic leaders seemingly were willing to see their parties become sectional. Indirectly, perhaps, Know-Nothingism contributed to the sectionalization of the Republican and Democratic parties by forcing them into more compact organizations. It has been erroneously charged that "at the door of the falsely named American Party must lie the charge of helping to confuse the voters and strengthen the forces of disruption."<sup>26</sup>

The conclusion that a "glaring trait" of Americanism was "its inconsistency, its incongruity, its lack of unity as a national movement" has recently been drawn.<sup>27</sup> The party succumbed partially because it was not founded on sectional issues in a period when only sectional issues could hold mass allegiance. Nationally, the party failed to be either proslavery or antislavery. The Republicans killed the party in the North, while Democrats killed it in the South by repeating monotonously that the Democrats were the only safe protectors of the South's rights. The Democrats, calling themselves a national party, were rapidly splitting into sectional factions.

The American Party fruitlessly turned a spotlight of attention upon evils resulting from unregulated immigration. Practically all the immigration reforms, and many of the naturalization reforms, suggested by the Americans have since been incorporated into Federal law. The anti-Catholic agitation sponsored by some of the Americans has from time to time been kindled and rekindled. With the lessening of the influence of foreign control over American Catholicism, over the priesthood, and over the training and thought of the clergy, has come the lessening of anti-Catholic agitation. Those who today condemn anti-Catholic movements

Fort Milton, *The Eve of Conflict* (New York, 1934), 230 ff.; Harold Underwood Faulkner, *American Political and Social History* (New York, 1940), 325-27; Homer Cary Hockett, *Political and Social Growth of the American People 1492-1865* (New York, 1940), 692 ff.; Jeannette P. Nichols and Roy F. Nichols, *The Growth of American Democracy* (New York, 1939), 241-42.

<sup>26</sup> Jesse Macy, *Political Parties in the United States, 1846-1861* (New York, 1918), 180.

<sup>27</sup> Harry J. Carman and Reinhard H. Luthin, "Some Aspects of the Know-Nothing Movement Reconsidered," in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, XXIX, No. 2 (April, 1940), 223.

might have felt that different conditions would have demanded such movements a hundred years ago. Americanism should not be regarded as a movement directed against any minority, any racial, or national group, or against any religion, but as a legitimate outburst directed against any foreigner or any religious tenet threatening the best welfare of the United States.

## APPENDIX

The following newspapers are among those which throughout the period of 1854-1860, or for a period of that time, or during their own limited existence supported the American cause in the Southern states:

### ALABAMA

*Auburn Gazette, Butler American Statesman, Cahaba American Citizen, Camden Herald, Carrollton Republican, Chambers Herald, Demopolis Marengo County American, Eufala Southern Native, Eutaw Alabama Whig, Eutaw Independent Observer, Fayetteville Banner, Grove Hill Herald, Hayneville Watchman, Huntsville American, Huntsville Independent, Livingston Whig, Macon Republican, Marion Commonwealth, Marion True American, Mobile Advertiser, Mobile Evening News, Mobile Tribune, Montevallo Herald, Montgomery Alabama State Journal, Montgomery Advertiser, Montgomery Daily Journal, Montgomery Daily Mail, Montgomery Tri-Weekly Mail, Moulton Democrat, Pickens Republican, Prattsville Southern Statesman, Selma Alabama State Sentinel, Selma Tri-Weekly Reporter, Talladega Reporter, Troy Independent American, Tuscaloosa Independent Monitor, Tuscumbia North Alabamian, Tuskegee Macon Republican, Uniontown Conservative, Wetumpka Spectator.*

### ARKANSAS

*Little Rock Arkansas Citizen, Helena Shield, Little Rock Gazette, Ouachita Herald, Pine Bluff American Citizen, Van Buren True American.*

### FLORIDA

*Alligator Advertiser, Jacksonville Republican, Marianna Patriot, Tallahassee Floridian and Sentinel, Tampa Peninsular.*



## GEORGIA

*Athens Southern Watchman, Atlanta American, Atlanta Weekly Discipline and Republican, Atlanta Intelligencer, Atlanta Republican, Augusta Daily Chronicle and Sentinel, Augusta Weekly Chronicle and Sentinel, Cherokee Central Georgian, Columbus Enquirer and Sun, Columbus Mirror, Dahlonga Sentinel, Griffin Recorder, Griffin Union, La Grange Reporter, Macon Citizen, Macon Journal and Messenger, Milledgeville Southern Recorder, Rome Courier, Savannah Republican, Shelbyville Expositor, Sparta Georgian, Sumpter Republican, Towsontown American Register, Wilkes Republican.*

## KENTUCKY

*Ashland Kentuckian, Bowling Green Gazette, Bowling Green Standard, Clarksville Chronicle, Cloversport Journal, Covington Journal, Cynthiana News, Danville Tribune, Elizabethtown Intelligencer, Elkton Banner, Frankfort Commonwealth, Henderson Courier, Hopkinsville Mercury, Hopkinsville Patriot, Georgetown Journal, Glasgow Journal, Lebanon Post, Lexington Observer and Reporter, Louisville American Free Mason, Louisville Daily Courier, Louisville Weekly Journal, Louisville Western Guardian, Madisonville Southern Patriot, Maysville Eagle, Mount Sterling Whig, Owensboro National American, Paducah Pennant, Paris Citizen, Princeton Kentuckian, Richmond Messenger, Russellville Herald, Shelby News, Somerset Gazette, Somerset True American, Smithland Courier, Winchester Journal.*

## LOUISIANA

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The many varied and extended studies on the decade preceding the Civil War have made familiar the great volume of sources available to the students of nativism and Know-Nothingism. It is only within the scope of these notes to evaluate types of these sources as they relate to the Know-Nothing movement in the South. Only a portion of the more important references used in the preparation of this study are included. No attempt is made to embrace all materials of value, whether or not cited.

### PRIMARY SOURCES

A relatively small number of manuscript collections throw an inside light on the maneuvering behind the political scene or are extensive or complete enough to do more than supplement and appraise other sources. Among these are the David Campbell Papers, Duke University; Sam Houston Papers, University of Texas; and R. J. Rusk Papers, University of Texas. The James S. Rollins Papers, of which there are two collections housed at the University of Missouri, are fruitful, though the bulk of these deposited with the Western Historical Manuscript Collection have been withdrawn from use. Other papers having more limited usefulness are: John Bell Papers, Library of Congress; William M. Burwell Papers, Library of Congress; C. C. Clay Papers, Duke University; J. J. Crittenden Papers, Duke University; J. J. Crittenden Papers, Library of Congress; Andrew J. Donelson Papers, Library of Congress; George Coke Dromgoole Papers, Duke University; T. W. Ellis Papers, Louisiana State Archives; J. S. Ford Memoirs, University of Texas; G. S. Houston Papers, Duke University; Abiel Leonard Papers, Missouri State Historical Society; Ashbel Smith Papers, University of Texas; R. D. Wall Papers, Duke University; and William Winans Papers, Mississippi State Archives.

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